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ABSTRACT

This document presents a guide for parents to help them understand and effectively parent their adolescent children. Section I focuses on Parent Haven, a weekly parent support group run by parents, volunteers, and staff of the Family Enhancement Program in Madison, Wisconsin, which provides on-the-job training and support for parents of preteens and teenagers. Areas discussed include a description of Parent Haven, an explanation of why parents attend Parent Haven, tools, guidelines, action steps, and the parent support network. Section II provides information for parents about the adolescent issues of truancy; runaways; self-esteem; sexuality; alcohol and drugs; rules, laws, and disobedience; emotional health; and child abuse/family violence. Section III provides information for parents about legal matters, including child abuse and juvenile court issues. Section IV contains information about out-of-home placement of children. Included in this section is a description of types of out-of-home placements and a discussion of a parent's rights and responsibilities when a child is placed outside the home. Section V, the final section, focuses on finding professional help and community resources. Suggestions are given for looking for counseling or therapy and a list of free resources for help with preteens and teenagers is included. (NB)

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A Parent Guide: about making it through the teen years.

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Parent Haven

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A Sharing of Information, Ideas, Experiences

Family Enhancement Program

A PARENT GUIDE

About Making It Through The Teen Years:

A Sharing of Information, Ideas, and Experiences

By Jessie Crane

with

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Art by Teri Jensen

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SECTION I:

PARENT HAVEN

What is Parent Haven?
Why Parents Come to Parent Haven
"Run Away Parents ?" - An Invitation
Parent Haven Tools
Parent Haven GUIDELINES: 14 Ideas About Families
"The Positive Approach"
Action Steps for Helping My Teenager
Action Steps for Helping Myself
My Parenting Support Network

LETTER FROM A PARENT HAVEN MOM

My daughter was 18 on Xmas day and has finally reached her dream of having her own apartment. She is doing very well. She is still in high school mornings and works part time. She is getting all A's and B's and will graduate in June. We get together often and have even developed a pretty good friendship. I would not have believed things would work out this well four years ago!

- Sandie

WHAT IS PARENT HAVEN ?

Parent Haven is a parent support group that is planned and carried out in a cooperative manner by parents, volunteers, and staff of the Family Enhancement Program in Madison, Wisconsin. Parent Haven is on-the-job training and support for parents of preteens and teenagers.

Parent Haven may be right for you if you hold these beliefs:

- **Being a parent of a teenager is a demanding job.**
- **I want to do a good job of parenting.**
- **I need information.**
- **I may need other parents to help and support me.**
- **I may need community resources to help me.**
- **I would like to help and support other parents.**

Parent Haven meetings have different uses, including time to:

- **Express feelings.**
- **Share what has happened recently.**
- **Get a perspective on things.**
- **Ask for suggestions.**
- **Gain new information.**
- **Plan for change.**
- **Plan for action using a problem-solving approach.**

Most of the mothers and fathers who come to Parent Haven have children who are exhibiting some of the following behaviors: truancy, emotional withdrawal, poor school performance, stealing, drug use, running away, violence, unapproved sexual activity. Children of some group members are living in foster homes, group homes, or treatment centers. The group has a wealth of experience, knowledge, and empathy to share with other parents.

LETTER FROM A PARENT HAVEN MOM

Sometimes I used to hate my kids and want to run away myself. But I know my daughter loves me and I love her. I don't care if she <u>likes</u> me. My kids are so neat, and now it is so much better than it was a year ago. I think the battle is worth it.

What I want to say to other parents is this. We <u>know</u> by living with our children. When we are dealing with the court or social workers we should <u>insist</u> on our gut feelings.

- Margrit

WHY PARENTS COME TO PARENT HAVEN

"When friends told me that my daughter was using "pot" and beer, I was so disappointed in her. I was afraid it would lead to bigger problems."

In Parent Haven, parents share tips about different ways to handle situations with the kids.

"After our son was caught stealing, and we were in Counseling and Court, we discovered we weren't the only ones who had trouble with our kids."

In Parent Haven, parents' lives really are important. It's not only children who matter in a family. Parent support groups have been a growing experience for many mothers and fathers.

"I was shocked when I caught my daughter and her boyfriend half-naked in each other's arms on the livingroom floor. I didn't think they were old enough to think about sex."

Parent Haven can help parents deal with, and understand, the changing needs of adolescents.

"Once again our son had a big fight with his father and went storming out of the house. I didn't know how to get my husband and son to get along with each other. I felt caught in the middle."

For fathers and mothers who need a place to talk about what's happening, a parent support group can be a big help.

"So much of what I'm about has to do with being a parent. When my son went to a group home, I felt like I'd failed at a person. I was so ashamed, I didn't want anyone to know."

At Parent Haven, you're not alone with your feelings.

"My teen-ager said she didn't have to listen to me about anything. Then she started staying out all night and I was at my wit's end."

The Parent Haven guidelines, and the discussions at meetings, offer help with family communication.

RUNAWAY PARENTS ?

(An invitation to Parent Haven)

"Where's breakfast?"
"I'm hungry. Mom - Dad."
"They're not in their room. Where could they be?"
"Go check outside. I'll call the neighbors."
"They're not outside."
"They're not at any of the neighbors'either. I'm getting worried. Go check and see if they left a note on the bulletin board."
"There is. There's a note from Mom and Dad that says, 'Kids, don't worry about us. We'll be okay. We just need to get away for awhile. Grandma and Grandpa will take care of you. Love you lots, Mom and Dad.' Wow! They've run away!"
"How could they if they love us? What about Dad's job? Where are they gonna go?"

Can you relate to this scene? Have you ever felt like running away? Who says kids have the market on running away from home?

But as parents and adults we're supposed to be mature, responsible, and rational. And in spite of all the pain, worry, etc. those little devils give us, we do love them and want to make sure they're safe. If we ran away, we'd spend half our time worrying and wondering about the kids and who's taking care of them.

Believe it or not, we do have a solution for you. A way for parents to run away, so to speak. Our group is made up of parents of kids that are hard to handle, kids that are skipping school, kids that are involved in juvenile court, kids in group homes, kids that we are just real worried about for a lot of different reasons. Our group is called **Parent Haven**. The name reflects the feeling of a safe, comfortable place to come to.

What are some of the things one needs to maintain a feeling of comfort when they run away? **Food, clothing, warmth, and shelter.**

How does Parent Haven fulfill these needs?

1. **FOOD:** We're fed generous portions of information on the problems facing parents and children in today's world. We get to voice our opinions to our guest experts (lawyers, social workers, psychologists), not to mention each other. We have lots of food for thought, knowing others are experiencing the same kinds of things. **WE ARE NOT ALONE.**
2. **CLOTHING AND WARMTH:** These can go together. We're clothed with the warmth and close ties we develop with each other because of the pain and sorrow we share as parents. We really do understand and we really do care.
3. **SHELTER:** We have our own meeting once a week. A place to escape from the rest of the world for a time and feel safe and secure to say what's truly on our minds and know no one is judging us or analyzing us. The surprise of someone else voicing feelings we've kept bottled up inside. Shelter away from the home-front battlegrounds and yet having a sense of home away from home.

Yes, Parent Haven is just that, a haven, a home away from home. PLEASE COME. RUN AWAY WITH US!

written by L O N D A C H I N N,
one of the founders of Parent Haven

PARENT HAVEN TOOLS: For Parents Struggling With the Teen Years

MEETINGS: Fellowship, sharing, and support are the basis of Parent Haven meetings. Additional meetings can be set up by two or more parents, for their own special conversation and sharing.

WRITING: Writing poetry, stories, or a journal helps many parents to deal with difficult times. Parents can submit their writings for possible publication in the Family Enhancement newsletter, in order to give help to others.

TELEPHONE CALLS: The phone can be a very helpful tool when a parent needs support. If parents wish, they can exchange phone numbers and keep in touch between meetings. Two parents who like each other and have some experiences in common can listen to each other and problem solve together.

READING: Books and articles about adolescents and family issues can provide fresh ideas. For example, parents can read one of the articles in this handbook, being alert for ideas that apply to their own situation.

CONFIDENTIALITY: In Parent Haven, parents often share names and phone numbers. They may share information about their family life, their feelings, and what is going on with their teenagers. We do this in trust and confidence that other parents in the group will never gossip about us or reveal private matters outside the group.

GUIDELINES: The 14 Parent Haven Ideas listed in this handbook provide a base of support for our thinking and discussion in the group. Parents are encouraged to re-read the guidelines, reflect about them, and discuss with friends or family.

PROFESSIONAL HELP: Family Enhancement Staff, and the Parent Haven parents, encourage seeking help from appropriate community agencies and professionals. We share information and recommendations about helpful individuals & programs.

PARENT HAVEN GUIDELINES

Fourteen Ideas About Families

Parent Haven assumes the following ideas are important. During meetings, we can discuss these ideas in more depth.

1. **IN TODAY'S WORLD, IT IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR PARENTS TO DO A GOOD JOB OF RAISING CHILDREN ALL BY THEMSELVES.** Most parents have a hard time raising teenagers. Most parents can use some help from other parents and possibly also from professionals.

2. **ALL OF US NEED ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE IN OUR LIVES.** Life is often confusing and hard for most of us, including teenagers. Nobody handles life perfectly. Teenagers need appreciation, a hopeful outlook and encouraging honest talk from adults who care about them. Constructive criticism may be needed also, but put-downs can destroy the self-esteem of parents and teens alike.

3. **I AM AN EXPERT IN MY OWN LIFE, AND I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY LIFE.** When I choose to ask others to help with my teenager, I am not giving up my role as a parent. I am asking for specialized knowledge and experience. I become a co-worker with others. However, in situations where the courts or child protective systems become involved, I may find that others have temporarily locked me out of decision making.

4. **WE PARENTS NEED TO TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES, OUR OWN NEEDS, EVEN WHILE WE FEEL VERY CONCERNED ABOUT OUR CHILDREN.** Problems with teenagers sometimes can result in a mother or father feeling so frustrated or exhausted that life temporarily loses all enjoyment. Problems with teenagers can also drive a wedge between their parents. It is important for parents to find occasions for relaxation, fun, adult relationships and enjoyment. This can be really hard to do, and parents need to be determined and resourceful.

5. **I CAN HELP MY CHILD LEARN TO DEAL WITH LIFE BY WORKING ON MY OWN PROBLEMS IN A POSITIVE WAY.** To some extent, at least, my child will use me as a model for living. For instance, if I have an alcohol problem, or I feel depressed constantly, or I have a marital problem, then getting help for myself shows my child a good example. Getting help for myself can also free a teenager from worries. Children very often blame themselves when parents have problems that are really not the childrens' fault.

6. **SPIRITUALITY OR FAITH IS AN IMPORTANT POWER WHICH PROVIDES SUPPORT TO MANY PARENTS.** In a group of parents, there may be many different understandings of God, religion, and the deep meanings of life. When life is hard, most of us want to call upon a power greater than ourselves, for strength and comfort. We can share what our spiritual life means to us in living through the teenage years of our children.

7. **WHEN A TEENAGER HAS A PROBLEM, THE WHOLE FAMILY HAS A PROBLEM.** A family is a system, not just a collection of separate individuals. How each person acts has an effect on everyone in the family. Usually, no one person is to blame, and anyway blaming doesn't help. Sometimes a family situation gets so complicated that it feels like a tangled ball of yarn. Family members need to start gradually figuring out the tangles and getting the yarn untwisted. Everybody may need to change a little bit.

8. **OPEN AND HONEST COMMUNICATION IN A FAMILY HELPS A TEENAGER DEAL WITH THE PRESSURES OF GROWING UP.** Teens need practice making decisions based on information shared between parent and child. When parents open the door to communication about everyday life, then difficult areas such as sexuality and drug use can be discussed more easily.

9. **ADOLESCENTS BENEFIT FROM HAVING CLEAR LIMITS AS THEY GROW TOWARD MORE INDEPENDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY.** The adolescent years place added demands on the job of being a parent. Just as parents may be reaching an age where they are settled in a life-style, teenagers feel a need to experiment, to challenge, and to assert their independence. Differences between parent and child seem inevitable. The rules I grew up with may or may not be appropriate for my own pre-teen or teenager. Some of our family rules may be "bottom line" rules, while others can be changed.

10. **ADOLESCENTS NEED TO FEEL THEY ARE WORTHWHILE AND CAN ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING POSITIVE IN LIFE.** In order to feel this way, teens need to develop their abilities, and they also need to feel appreciated by others, including their parents. A teenager may be very able in all sorts of skills, and yet not feel appreciated, especially if parents are quite critical and demanding. Another teen may actually not have developed his/her skills, and may need parents to assist in finding skill areas where the child can succeed.

11. **THE SCARS OF VERBAL ABUSE, PHYSICAL ABUSE, OR SEXUAL ABUSE STAY WITH A CHILD AND A FAMILY. PATTERNS OF ABUSE ARE PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.** When any member of the family is being abused, other family members are harmed. And also, the person doing the abusing is harmed. Community standards about family violence are changing, so that physical and sexual aggression among parents and children is no longer acceptable or legal as it sometimes was considered to be in the past. Parents can seek for and learn new ways of discipline and new ways to relate to each other so a family can cease to be a battleground.

12. **THE ONLY PERSON I HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE IS ME.** But even a small change can make a big difference for my own life. My small changes may make a difference for my family and my teenager as well as for me, because my change may influence my child or my partner to change also.

13. **FORGIVENESS HEALS, BUT LONG-HELD RESENTMENT AND BLAMING ATTITUDES PREVENT FAMILIES FROM CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.** Sometimes families keep dragging up hurt feelings and quarrels from long ago. Some ways to get rid of those old painful feelings include: talking things over openly with others in the family, finding the courage to forgive and forget, or working with a counselor. When a family can leave the old hurts and hates behind, then parents and children can be more free to work on the problems of the present.

14. **EACH PERSON IS UNIQUE, AND WE ALL GO THROUGH LIFE DIFFERENTLY, CHARTING OUR OWN COURSE AS WE ARE ABLE.** Adolescence is a transition time, a time of becoming. My teenager is still a miracle and a gift even in the midst of anti-social or self-damaging behaviors. I don't have to give up hope that life will become better for my teenager. But my child is not my property, mine to control and shape exactly as I would wish. IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LIFETIME, I CANNOT EITHER TAKE ALL THE CREDIT OR ALL THE BLAME FOR WHAT HAPPENS TO MY CHILD. I WILL DO THE BEST I CAN.

THE POSITIVE APPROACH

Yes it hurts. Yes this is a time of turmoil, mental agitation, bewilderment and embarrassment. This is a time when it is difficult to keep things in perspective.

Take a deep breath. Try to relax and be calm. Collect your wits. You will live through this and better days will come.

It is difficult, but try to remember that even though your child is arrogant, he is hurting too. What you do now can make a difference in the future. Try to approach it positively. Don't dwell in the past and torture yourself with the where, what and how questions. Where did I go wrong? What is wrong with me as a parent? How did I fail this child? Be Positive. What can I do to make things better from now on? How can I improve my relationship with my child? Make this situation work to your mutual benefit.

Here are some suggestions that may help you when your child is in trouble with the school or with the law, or is living out of your home:

1. As soon as your child gets involved in the system -- get to know the people in charge. The sooner you do this the better. As these people get to know you, they will pay more attention to your opinion about rules etc. for your child. Also, you will be in a better position to understand their rules when they do not agree with what you would like.

2. Try to work with the school or court or foster home personnel, instead of against them.

3. Prioritize your concerns for your child. Only argue for the high priority issues. If you argue about everything you may be ignored completely.

4. Let go a little. This is probably the hardest, but it is necessary for positive results. Right now, if social workers or other professional people are working with your child, you realistically have less control. Don't feel that letting go now will ruin the chances of your child seeing you as a parent who has some say over their life. In reality the opposite is true. By letting go you provide room for both you and your child to grow. It is easier to focus on the positive and make that work to improve your relationship.

5. Try to maintain a unified front with the professionals who are attempting to help your child. At this age children are very good manipulators. If a problem arises call the person in charge immediately. You may not always agree with their decisions, but don't let your child know this. It is better to go along with their decision, than to create a situation where the child can play one against the other.

6. Try not to get involved in who is right and who is wrong, who is good and who is bad. As someone said in a song, "there ain't no good guys, there ain't no bad guys, there's just you and me and we just disagree."

7. We all tend to be our own worst critic. Don't be so hard on yourself. Maintain the "I'm ok, you're ok" attitude.

8. Do attend the Parent Haven meetings, or attend some other support group that works together on family issues. Share your experiences and learn from others. The support, ideas, and consolation is there when you need it.

We all know that carpenters and mechanics need tools to build or rebuild things. We as parents also need tools to build or rebuild relationships with our children. To summarize and make this easy to remember, let's make a list of tools we will need for the positive approach to parenting a child in trouble:

P atience

O penness

S incerity

I nitiative

T alk

I ntelligence

V igor

E xperience

written by S A N D I E L Y N N,
a mother who learned these things by her own experience.
Sandie was one of the founders of Parent Haven in 1982.

ACTION STEPS FOR HELPING MY TEENAGER

The choice of steps belongs to each individual.
There are many other possible steps that could be positive.
Choose what seems best to you, and plan your action.

-I will look at my own life, for changes I am ready and able to make.
-I will look at the lives of other parents who have made changes. I may find models to try out for myself.
-I won't keep my concerns or problems a secret. I will weave my own network of support, people that I decide to trust and share with.
-I will reach out to other parents, to community agencies and professionals, to my pastor, priest, or rabbi, or to a law enforcement agency.

-I will improve communication in my family by learning and practicing assertiveness.
-When my teenager is assertive, I will listen and respond respectfully.
-I will appreciate my own needs, strengths, ideas, and uniqueness.
-I will respect my teenager's needs, strengths, ideas, and uniqueness, also.
-I will improve communication with my teenager by active listening to everyday feelings or experiences without being impatient or critical.

- I will discuss rules with other parents.
- I will keep re-thinking what rules are appropriate as my child grows older.
- I will convey clear rules to my child.
- I will provide consequences for breaking rules.
- I will be creative in setting up consequences that are appropriate.
- At times, I will negotiate with my teenager for changes in the rules.

- I will recognize a Power or God that is greater than myself, and rely upon that power for strength, comfort, and direction.
- I will respect the spirituality or faith of other parents, even when it may be very different from mine.

- I will learn and use non-violent ways to discipline my teenager.
- I will find help in the community to stop the violence in my family.
- If adults or children in my family are caught up in power struggles that we try to solve by anger and force, I will step back and take a fresh look at our life together. I will begin changing our life, one small step at a time.

- When my teenager is involved with authorities outside the family, I will be assertive, and exercise my right to express my opinions and concerns.
- I will become well informed about laws and regulations that affect my child.

ACTION STEPS FOR TAKING CARE OF MYSELF

- I will remember that I am a parent, not a magician. When I feel helpless at times, I will admit that without shame.
- I will appreciate myself for things I do well, and for even very small changes that I choose to make.
- I will find enjoyment and relaxation for myself, either alone or with the companionship of people who care about me.

When my life feels very hard, I sometimes need to talk about my own problems and feel I just don't have the inner strength to support other parents.

When my life is going better, I will still need support but I will be more able to provide support to others.

HELPING ANOTHER PARENT IS NOT A ONE WAY STREET

In a parent support group, each of us gives, and each of us receives. None of us has all the answers. Each of us has a right to be listened to and supported by others in the Parent Haven group. "Support" does not always mean we will agree with each other, but it means we will listen and respect the other person's needs or concerns. We may make suggestions about what another parent might do differently, if the person wants suggestions. We will listen to suggestions from other parents, if we want suggestions. We will remember that the choice of what to do belongs to each individual, not to the group.

MY PARENTING SUPPORT NETWORK

Our Helping Relationship in Parent Haven Is a Mutual One.
Each of Us Gives, and Each of Us Receives

Name	Address	Phone

This is my list of some of the people I can call on when I feel concerned about my child. Different ones of these helpers can provide different kinds of help. Some may just be really good listeners. With some, I can problem-solve. Others may have information that can help me. Some of the people to include might be parents I met at Parent Haven; or relatives that I trust; or school staff people; or a social worker, therapist, or community agency.

SECTION II:

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

ABOUT ADOLESCENT ISSUES

Truancy
Running Away
Low Self Esteem
Teenage Sexuality
Alcohol and Other Drugs
Rules, Laws, and Disobedience
Adolescents and Emotional Health
Child Abuse and Other Family Violence

TRUANCY

A truant is a child absent from school without a legitimate reason, and without the permission of his parents or the school.

We are including a lot of information about truancy in this handbook not only because children need to get educated, but also for a special reason: truancy is often a first indicator that parents see, pointing to a variety of problems a teenager is experiencing. Paying attention to truancy can help parents to become more aware and effective in an adolescent's life.

Many of us parents remember skipping school once in a long while. Or we may remember that our Mom or Dad would sometimes write us an excuse for a special reason such as studying for an exam, or maybe even going to some religious service or political event. As a parent now, I remember two days a few years ago, when I had my twelve year old daughter stay away from school to care for an injured little brother so that I would not have to miss work. It took a lot of phone calls to find an adult sitter for him, so she could go back to school. As a parent, I can use my own good sense about permitting such once-in-a-while breaktimes for my child, even though school personnel may not always approve.

All the same, I did believe that going to school regularly, day after day, was important for my kids. I didn't want them to be truant. By reading and talking with school staff, I found out that truancy tends to increase steadily as a child gets older. Often, a child will not start skipping school until about 9th grade, the beginning of high school. So that is an important time for parents to be alert.

Mary W. found out that her daughter was truant when a school secretary phoned her, saying "Why haven't you contacted us about this? We've mailed you dozens of skip notices!" Mary discovered that her daughter had been removing the skip notices from the mailbox at home before her mother returned from work each afternoon. Mary began at once working with the school and with her daughter to figure out what was going wrong and how to turn the situation around. As one part of the process, Mary rented a post office box and had the school personnel address skip notices to the box number.

Mary's daughter was 14 and just starting 9th grade when the truancy started. Mary discovered that a number of 14 year olds from the same school were skipping school together and encouraging one another. One of the mothers, Janet, became so concerned that she took several weeks leave of absence from work and actually escorted her daughter into each classroom, met her after class, and walked with her to the next class! Can you imagine how embarrassing that must have felt to the daughter! At least the kid could be certain that her mom really cared about school!

It is usually not a simple matter to take effective action when a child skips school. George and Laura, for example: "We were really distressed when we realized that our 14 year old was out of classes at least 50% of the time. We tried every action we could think of - talking with him, listening to his complaints about particular teachers and classes, setting up a drug assessment appointment, and finally having family therapy together with him. Eventually he decided, with our permission and encouragement, to enroll in an

alternative high school. We really don't know which of these actions made the difference. Perhaps we needed to do all of them in order to turn a miserable situation into a positive one. At any rate, now, two years later, our son is a high school senior, very positive about school, and we are glad we made all those efforts."

REASONS THAT CHILDREN ARE TRUANT. Reasons can be very different for different children. And for most teenagers there may be several different factors that contribute to the problem. I as a parent may be part of the problem. The school may be failing to meet the child's needs. Friends may be encouraging misbehavior. My son or daughter may be struggling with personal issues or family situations that make school seem irrelevant.You may want to identify items that fit your own family, from the list that follows. There can be more than one factor that promotes truancy. When you begin to identify reasons for truancy, you can plan for appropriate actions.

School-related Problems. Does your child have special needs which the school needs to deal with more effectively? Is school work too difficult, or not stimulating enough? Is there a poor relationship with a particular teacher? Is your child experiencing painful anxiety about failing tests or about speaking out in class? Statistics indicate that teens from minority groups and teens who are in special education classes tend to be over-represented among truants.

If your child is in any of these situations, you may need to be a persistent advocate at school for developing a more positive learning environment. As a parent, I need to approach school personnel in a positive manner and try to help get these situations improved on behalf of my child. Also I need to approach my teenager in a positive manner to help him or her to cope with school even though the school environment may be less than perfect.

When Mary W's daughter began skipping school in 9th grade, a part of the reason turned out to be related to an injured knee. The knee problem prevented this teenager from participating in sports, which had been a joy for her. Adding to this discouragement, a gym teacher refused to accept her doctor's written excuse and threatened loss of gym credit. One of the many actions which Mary needed to work through was arranging with the school for alternate credit options instead of gym class. This took a lot of effort, although Mary assumed at first that it would be a very simple matter.

A school social worker says that parents need to know these things about schools:

It is really difficult to get the help you want from schools.
You have to be assertive and keep trying.
It helps to write down your questions before phoning or going to meet with school personnel.
Problems with school often continue over a period of years if the problems stem from the special individual differences of the child.
Problems seldom respond to simple solutions. Keep trying.
Solutions that work for a while then may cease to work. Don't give up. Keep thinking and trying.

Family related problems. Research suggests that situations within the family often contribute to truancy.

For example, some of us parents really disliked school ourselves and find it difficult to encourage a child to keep trying and to work through unpleasant situations. Sometimes keeping a teenager in school is such a struggle that it just seems easier to give up. But teenagers really do need to know for certain that their parents believe education is important, especially when the teenager is feeling discouraged and not getting much self-esteem from being in school.

Has your family moved recently, or perhaps many times during your child's years in school? Children may find it difficult to adjust to a great deal of change. They may need extra attention and listening from parents, or some special planning with school staff. It can be very hard to leave school friends and familiar places behind.

Sometimes the example of a brother or sister who dropped out of school, or who was truant, seems to encourage the younger siblings to be truant as well.

Research suggests that if there has been a death in the family within the past two years a child is more likely to be truant. Perhaps the child needs encouragement to talk about the death, or needs to feel sure that other members of the family are able to grieve and gradually to recover from such a devastating event.

Problems being experienced by parents, such as marital discord, alcoholism,job stress,etc., sometimes divert a teenager's attention from normal concerns like going to school. Children know when their parents are having problems. It doesn't really help my teenager when I just pretend everything is great and they can see that actually everything is rather grim right now.

Seeking Adventure or Independence. Adolescents as part of their normal development want some new excitement and freedom. The challenge for me as a parent is to guide my teenager toward a more positive kind of excitement rather than truancy.

Peer related problems. There may be a bully or a particular group of teenagers who are making life miserable for my child, with actual violence or threats of violence. School staff or in extreme cases even the police can be asked for their opinions and help.

My teenager may be using alcohol or other drugs, probably with the encouragement of peers at school. Drugs sometimes become the central focus of a teenager's daily life,so that school and everyday social life cease to be interesting. A drug assessment may be helpful. School staff, your physician, or a community agency such as PICADA can tell parents how to obtain this.

Another teenager or group of teens may be cooperating with my son or daughter in truanting as well as in other forms of unacceptable behavior. It may be tempting to blame the other children completely. At the same time, other parents will probably be tempted to blame my child. Blaming won't help the situation. Contacting other parents to discuss the situation could be a positive step, difficult though that feels when I feel afraid of their reaction. When parents pool information often each family gains a truer picture.

Rejection by Other Teenagers (or sometimes even by school staff). Rejection may increase pressures on a child so that the school climate feels very stormy

and unwelcoming. Often a teenager's clothing, hair style, physical appearance, or even political activism result in negative treatment at school. A parent can sometimes help by discussing the situation with school staff. Also a parent can help by listening to the child's feelings and helping the child to understand that people are often uninformed or unfair. Like our teenagers, we parents often must live and work in situations that are not entirely positive.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT TRUANCY. In addition to the specific suggestions above, parents can consider the following:

Express Your Disapproval of Truancy. Convey to your child your conviction that education is important. Consistently and firmly give the message that he/she must attend school. Take personal responsibility for ensuring that your child attends school. Establish a close liaison with the school so you know immediately if your child cuts a class or does not attend school. Be persistent in your school contacts. It may be difficult to establish that you are seriously concerned and will insist upon being informed. You can insist on a daily sign-in sheet in the office which your child should sign to prove school attendance.

Be Understanding. Listen to your preteen or teenager's reasons for not attending school. Encourage your son or daughter to tell you his/her feelings about it. Don't say, "You shouldn't feel that way." Can you say something more like "I really do understand that you hate school right now"?

Help your child find a good relationship with at least one adult on the school staff. Experience indicates that a teenager who is on friendly terms with a teacher, counselor, or administrator is likely to stay in school.

Provide Incentives. Arrange rewards for school attendance, and penalties for non-attendance. Rewards could include use of the car, phone privileges, dating privileges, allowances, having friends over to the house, etc. Rewards and penalties work best if you and your child write a contract together which spells out exactly what the rewards are for each day's attendance, and what the penalties are for each day's absence. Child and parent should both sign the contract. The contract should be very simple and specific.

Work to improve the educational climate and opportunities for your teenager if you believe change is needed. Perhaps a different course or a change of teachers is needed. Possibly one of the alternative public schools, or even a private school is a good option. School districts vary a great deal in what alternatives they offer, and parents may have to be very persistent in order to find out what all the options are. In the Madison Metropolitan School District the following alternatives for teenagers are usually available. However, the locations and rules change from time to time:

Malcolm Shabaz City High School
High School Work and Learning Center
Diploma Completion Program (evening classes)
Project AIMS (Assistance to Increase Minority Success)
S.A.M. (School Age Maternity Program)
School Within a School
Summer School Programs

Call for help from county social services or the juvenile court if all else fails. According to a school social worker who specializes in truancy situations, the court system is often helpful in stopping truancy, especially with middle school children. However these public systems are overloaded and do not offer magical solutions. When we asked a group of juvenile court workers what we should say to parents of teenagers, they said: "Tell the parents that raising teenagers is really hard and parents need to be very active and very thoughtful. They must not assume they can just turn a kid over to us and we can fix the situation. If parents will really work with us and keep trying to find the right things to do, that can work out."

If parents or the school make a decision to file a truancy petition in the juvenile court, there are a number of requirements that must first be met by staff in the school district. These include:(a) Meeting with parents to discuss the truancy, or attempting to meet and being refused by parents; (b) providing an opportunity for educational counseling to the child, and considering curriculum modifications; (c) evaluating the child for learning problems and taking steps to overcome any such problems; (d) evaluating whether social problems are a cause of the truancy and, if so, taking appropriate action or making appropriate referrals. A fine of not less than $5 and not more than $25 is provided for any school district administrator, principal, teacher or school attendance officer who violates this section.

Please refer to the flow chart in "Information for Parents About Legal Matters", for more details about the process for filing a petition in juvenile court.

Don't give up on education. When you feel as if you've tried everything, and nothing has helped, and your teenager has maybe dropped out of school for good, of course you're going to feel discouraged. Remember there are educational opportunities lifelong. Many adolescents eventually get their GED (General Educational Diploma) by independent study and a test. Others go back to high school after their classmates have all graduated. Some families, with the agreement of their teenager, enroll their son or daughter in a home study correspondence course from the University of Wisconsin or other universities that offer course work for high school subjects. The Area Technical Colleges in Wisconsin offer a variety of tutoring and make-up options for adolescents and adults. Recently I talked with a man who is just completing a professional college degree at the age of 30 but who at 17 was a high school drop-out hitchhiking around the USA. He said "I really wish I hadn't wasted so much time before deciding to get an education. But looking back, I don't exactly know how my parents could have stopped me from dropping out. I am glad my parents didn't give up on me completely, and were still willing to help me out with some of my college expenses."

FOR HELP WITH THIS ARTICLE, PARENT HAVEN THANKS
MARY, JANE, JANET, CATHIE, GEORGE, LAURA
AND THE MANY OTHER PARENTS WHO HAVE TALKED
WITH US ABOUT TRUANCY.
THANKS ALSO TO HANNAH PINKERTON AND OTHER SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS.

Dear Parent:

You make the difference! You, as the parent, can help your child stay in school and not be truant. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Start early: When your child is in elementary school, don't allow yourself or your child to use excuses for missing school such as "We were on vaction," "He had to go to the store for me," or "We overslept." Regular attendance patterns start with you!

2. Middle school years are a common time when kids start skipping school. Be aware when your child "skips" and have a consequence for skipping (such as no T.V., or staying home from an event.) Use the consequence immediately upon skipping even if it presents a hardship to you.

   If you're not sure your child is in school, call the school if they have not called you. Know the hours of school and the bus route and times. Buy an alarm clock! Every middle school child can get up, dressed, and fed by himself if you have to be at work. If you're at home be sure to set the example for him.

3. First semester of the 9th grade year is crucial!

   a. Start in 8th grade by selecting realistic courses that your child can handle in high school. Be honest with counselors and assistant principals about past attendance problems.

   b. The first nine weeks check on your child's attendance routinely. Don't wait for quarter grades. Call the grade level office and insist your child have a daily sign-in sheet and CHECK IT EVERY NIGHT.

   c. Help your child find someone in the school to "hook into" -- maybe a teacher, a coach, or the social worker.

4. If your child is behind in credits, start talking with the school about alternative programs, alternative classes, etc. Call your child's counselor, assistant principal or teacher.

Think about your priority for education! Does it come first on your list for your child?

Hannah Pinkerton

Hannah Pinkerton,
Social Worker

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RUNNING AWAY

Many adolescents experiment with running away in relatively mild forms, such as staying away from home for a night or two. For most of us parents this is terrifying and we feel very angry as well as extemely relieved when a child returns home. Probably the very most helpful thing parents can do is to open up communication right away, telling the child you were worried, you are glad he or she returned, and that now you are going to have a long discussion about why this happened and how to prevent it happening again. Try to understand how your child is feeling about his or her life, about situations in the family, and about the world. Listen to your child's problems and try to see the world as the teenager does. Recognize that you, the parent, are part of the problem. Be willing to do some negotiating. Try really hard to get this heart- to- heart conversation going, and keep it going. If you just can't talk to each other, then look for a third party to sit down with parents and child and help you. This could be a family friend, a teacher, counselor, pastor - someone with maturity and the ability to listen to both sides.

Briarpatch Youth Organization in Madison asked many teenagers their reasons for running away. 873 different boys and girls replied, and they listed 971 separate problems, from acne to incest to curfew to old-fashioned parents to fear of nuclear war to death of a pet, and a bewildering variety of other reasons.

Some experts group the causes for running away as follows:

Family conflict. The child feels rejected or misunderstood.Communication is blocked. Parents may have confronted child about clothes, curfew, friends, values. Parents may be alcoholic or abusive. Problems may realistically be quite minor, or may be very serious.

Sudden crisis. A pregnancy, breakup of a relationship, car accident.

School problems. Bad report card, lots of absences, general lack of success.

Personal characteristics. The child may be an impulsive person who has a history of poorly planned decisions.

Manipulation by the child. The boy or girl may be using running away as a weapon to get demands met.

Independence. The teenager may want to get free of parents values or career goals, and have more control of his/her own life.

Throwaways and Walkaways. About 3% of runaways are forced to leave, by their families. Others walk away by mutual consent between parents and child.

Suggestions For Preventing Running Away

Observe your child. Watch for early warning signs that your son or daughter is in stress: for example, lying, cheating, stealing, irritability, quarrels

with friends, sleeplessness, using alcohol or other drugs. These signs may be in part a call for help.

Relate to your child. Give your son or daughter time, encouragement, affection.

Deal with your own problems. Are you in a lot of stress yourself, so that you are overly critical and irritable with your teenager, or ignoring the child? Are you using alcohol to avoid working on family problems? Is your teenager being abused sexually or physically by a member of your family? Are you feeling isolated as a parent, with nobody to help you decide how to guide your teenager? Admit your own needs and find help from other parents, family members, a support group, or a professional.

Be straight with your child. When your adolescent threatens to run away, say "I will really worry about you if you run away, because I will be thinking about all the terrible things that might happen to you." Unless you are really sure the child is bluffing, don't say "Good, I'll help you pack!"

Give independence. But make changes gradually and thoughtfully. Don't be totally permissive. Give your teenager more freedom about choice of friends, values, and life planning - but make it one step at a time.

Problem solve with your teenager as you plan for more independence. Listen to what your child wants to have changed, and do some negotiating. Usually this will mean your child gains some freedoms, but also accepts more of your demands in other areas.

Actions to Try if Running Away Continues

Build your relationship with your teenager. Many runaways need to experience greater love from parents. You probably care very deeply for your child. Can you help the child believe in your affection? Some parents find that a special trip or vacation together is helpful to the relationship.

Arrange a cooling off period, for yourself. Get away from the situation for a while, by taking a long walk or drive. Get away for an evening by coming to Parent Haven or another support group. Some parents even arrange to be away for a couple of weeks, to get a perspective on the situation and take care of their own needs.

Arrange a cooling off period, for your teenager. Is there a relative or a family friend with whom your child could stay for a few days or weeks, or even for a whole semester? If not, Briarpatch Youth Organization in Madison may be able to provide a volunteer foster home for up to two weeks, for Dane County residents. If you decide to have your teenager live away from home for a time, be sure to talk this over with your substitute caregiver, and be sure your teenager hears the conversation and hears the adults agree on what will be the rules and arrangements.

Participate in counseling with your teenager. Briarpatch can provide a few sessions without charge, using trained volunteer counselors. If you need more sessions, Briarpatch can recommend counselors. Or, see the page in this handbook about Choosing a Therapist.

Ask for help from your local police, the Dane county sheriff, or the Dane County Department of Social Services. For more information about this, see the section on the Wisconsin Children's Code, including a flow chart about CHIPS petitions and juvenile court process. Briarpatch Youth Organization suggests to parents that they call the police immediately if a child is on the run. A police officer will come to your home and take a statement, including a description of your child. The officer will ask what you wish done with your child if the police find him/her. You can ask to have the child brought home, or you can choose to meet the child either at the police station or at Briarpatch. With both parent and teenager present, then a police officer will help discuss the situation briefly. If you meet at Briarpatch you can arrange for additional discussion time with a counselor there. There are two reasons for calling police right away: first, **safety:**- that is, your child is more likely to be found quickly; second, **for the record:** that is, if the child becomes a frequent runaway so that you decide you need help from the juvenile court, the record will show how many times the child has run, and how often you have tried to stop the running.

Accept alternative placement or treatment as decided by the court. Children who run away may be placed in a foster home, group home, or treatment facility. Or the court may provide for home detention, further counseling, etc. Sometimes these alternatives succeed. Often, however, a child will continue to run away from alternative placements. Sometimes the court will give up trying to prevent runaway behavior. Some teenagers then continue to live unsupervised and without economic support from parents or social services. Results are often but not always tragic for the child and family. Some teenagers do survive these severe runaway experiences and go on to more normal lives, expecially if they continue to receive emotional support from family members or if they find supportive friends who do not promote criminal activities.

THESE BOOKS WERE HELPFUL IN PREPARING THIS ARTICLE:
"How to Help Children With Common Problems",
1981, by Schaefer & Millman, a Mosby Medical Library Publication
and
"Kids Who Run Away",
1984, by Joseph Palenski, R.& E. Publishers

LOW SELF ESTEEM AND TEENAGERS

In Dane County, Wisconsin, 25,000 boys and girls are enrolled in grades 7 through 12. A Dane County Youth Commission questionnaire in 1985 revealed a troubling fact about these youngsters. Significant numbers of both sexes have low self esteem. For example, 41% of boys and 63% of girls said they "feel useless." Another example: 29% of boys and 52% of girls said they "sometimes feel I am no good at all". Even allowing for adolescent exaggeration, these seem surprisingly high numbers. On every question that measured self-esteem, girls indicated more self esteem problems than boys did. 50% of girls said "I wish I could have more respect for myself", compared to 39% of boys.

Why is self esteem an important topic for parents to consider? Research indicates that people with low self esteem are at high risk. For example, teenage young women with low self esteem are at risk for pregnancy. Teenage boys and girls with low self esteem are at risk for drug and alcohol abuse. Low self esteem increases the risk of delinquent behavior. Therefore, it seems as though mothers and fathers who help teenagers feel positive about themselves will also help lower the risk of serious problems.

It is important to remember that our sons and daughters pick up much of their feelings about self-worth from outside the family. Older children are sensitive to what their peers think of them, especially when their self-esteem is low. Others who send self-esteem messages to our teens include teachers, neighbors, even sales clerks and the police. When the world's messages are positive, the world is rosy and their self esteem may soar. When the world sends negative messages, our teens' self esteem is about as high as a caterpillar's knee caps. At these bad times, our teens need us to pick up the pieces, to engage in much empathic listening, and to do much cherishing.

We can help rebuild our teens' feelings of self-worth; and a child with his or her self esteem intact is not as likely to engage in behaviors which distress us. We need to put ourselves aside for a moment, take them seriously, and really listen to them. We need to believe in them, encourage them, love them, and support them. And the higher our own self esteem is, the more successful we will be in doing this.

And now a few words of comfort for those of us who are in the process of raising a troublesome teen. It is <u>normal</u> for teens to put serious dents in <u>our self esteem.</u> As they begin to separate from our authority and prepare themselves for adulthood, they suddenly see us as people with flaws and problems. We are no longer super-heroes. The more we set ourselves on pedestals when our children were young, the harder our teens may shake those pedestals to topple us off. Knowing this, we can more readily "roll with the punches".

Dorothy Corkville Briggs wrote a helpful book called "Your Child's Self Esteem". She says there are two basic elements for parents to keep in mind when we want to build self esteem in our children: <u>focused attention</u> and <u>psychological safety</u>.

Focused attention means much more than being in the same room with a child, or answering "uh-huh" while attending to some task. It means that we must set aside a block of time to sit with them, establish eye contact, and listen to their ideas, experiences, frustrations, or plans. Don't try to solve all

their problems, but encourage them to figure their problems out and solve them for themselves. Children want an attentive listener while they work out their own problems. When a child is given focused attention by a parent, he comes to believe that he is a valuable person just because he exists, and he can handle life with competence. He believes he has something worthwhile to offer others.

Psychological safety means an emotionally safe atmosphere that includes five ingredients: trust
nonblaming
cherishing
owning feelings
empathy

Dorothy Briggs suggests these ingredients act like "antibiotics" against the "germs" that promote neurotic behavior. A brief explanation of each ingredient follows.

Trust. Trust is the bedrock of safety. First, a child needs to know she or he will be fed when they're hungry, dressed warmly when it's cold, and allowed to sleep when they're tired. Most of us do well at meeting these physical needs. However, sometimes we are not aware of another area of trust. This is the area of relationships. A child learns to trust relationships if we parents are appropriately honest. This means that the "messages" we send to children need to be real. For example, if we are frustrated, or angry, or happy, or sad, we need to communicate that not only with our faces and our body language but also with our words. Perhaps we think we are protecting our children when we say that nothing is wrong when we are seething inside. But we don't protect them – we just confuse them. Does this mean we must tell our children everything? Of course not! We needn't burden them with grown-up problems, but we need to be honest about our feelings. "Yes, honey, I am really furious right now. But I am not angry with you. It is my problem and I am working it out." Or, "Yes, honey, I am really furious right now. When you stay out after curfew, I feel so angry and upset I can hardly talk to you at all. But it is a relief to have you back home."

Nonblaming. Blaming (negative judgement) is at the core of emotional disorder and low self esteem. To avoid blaming and its consequences we parents need to separate a child's behavior and the child. We need to communicate our feelings and values without using negative labels. Generally, "you" messages send blame or judgment. Generally, "I" messages send a reaction to behavior.

Examples

Blaming messages ("you")	Behavior messages ("I")
You're a liar!	-I can't believe your words when your actions don't match.
You're mean and selfish!	-I feel very distressed when I see you treat your friend that way. I want you to be considerate. Let's talk.
You're just lazy.	-When you don't do the jobs that are assigned to you, I feel really imposed upon. I want you to do your share.

Cherishing. Cherishing is stronger than acceptance. It is the feeling of wonder we have for our child about her absolute uniqueness. We parents demonstrate a cherishing attitude toward our children when we treat them with respect just as we would our friends. We are sensitive to their sensitivities. We would not tell a friend, "You dummy! What do you know!" If we put down our children in this manner, they feel unimportant and unloved; and their self-esteem plunges.

Once we cherish ourselves, it is easier to cherish our children. Our ability to cherish others comes from how much we value ourselves. It is important that we love and cherish ourselves. When we blame ourselves, and concentrate only on our faults, we fall into a negative thinking pattern. This creates negativity in our family and our children. CHANGE YOUR FOCUS! Instead of looking for what they do wrong, look for what they do right. CATCH THEM BEING GOOD!

Owning feelings. Feelings are o.k. It is o.k. to feel irritated, angry, confused, sad, impatient, rebellious. People can repress feelings, or can express feelings. Expressing feelings is healthy. But we don't need to act out our feelings by hurting someone, or breaking the rules, or getting into trouble. The healthy thing to do with feelings is to talk about them.When we accept feelings and talk about them, they can serve their purpose and go away.

It is important for my child to be able to express her personal, internal feelings. How can I help her express feelings, and still try to guide her behavior in an effective way?

For example, my teenage daughter, Jacci, slams down the telephone receiver in the midst of a major disagreement with her best friend Gretchen. Then she glares at me, almost daring me to say something. What do I say? In order to help her own her feelings of anger and frustration, yet to let her know that I do not approve of the telephone receiver being slammed in Gretchen's ear, I might say, "Jacci, I can tell you're really angry with Gretchen. Tell me some more about it." Then I could really listen to her talk about what has upset her. I could let her talk her anger out. Then I might say, "Jacci, what could you do that would let Gretchen know how you're feeling? Can you think of a better way to deal with this, instead of just hanging up on her?"

This would allow Jacci to accept and communicate her anger, but not encourage her to express it with unacceptable behavior. If a child is helped to separate feelings from behavior, she can come to appreciate her individuality. When a child is able to accept who she is, she can become more assertive, creative, and less vulnerable to the hurtful influences of the world. She can feel she has control over herself.

As parents we need to allow our children to be who they are. Our ways of feeling and seeing are not the only ways of seeing and feeling. "It's all right to be me" applies to me as an adult and also to my daughter or son. Children who know this don't need to hide behind pretense, or or to try to ram their perceptions down the throats of others. So they get along better with people.

Empathy. Empathy, the fifth "antibiotic", is better than sympathy. It means feeling with the other person. It means another person sets aside his ideas and enters my world, putting aside judgement and criticism. An empathic person "tunes in" to the words and to the feelings and attitudes behind the words.

He watches a son's or a daughter's body posture and facial expressions for clues.

As a father, when my teenager slumps into a chair with a glum face and says, "Well, the term paper is done", I am empathic if I pick up on the slump and glum face rather than the words. I might say, "You look discouraged. What's going on?" Then I could listen. In a difficult spot, a person's first hunger is for understanding. Logic, advice, or explanations can wait until he has felt understood. Take time. Suspend judgement. Be with your teenager emotionally while he works through his problem.

Conclusion. Within every child is a push toward emotional growth. This growth is not a steady upward progression; it has a zigzag pattern. To help a child grow emotionally we must sometimes allow him to retreat from growth into the safety of childhood without feeling ashamed or dishonored. Teens who behave like an adult one day and a ten-year-old the next need to know that it's o.k. for them to be ten years old again for a while. Being ten years old is a safety measure for them. When they feel safe, they will once again experiment with adulthood.

Children are resilient, and so are parents - we can bounce back in spite of our mistakes. Changing the way we talk and listen to our children is not easy at first but gets easier with practice. While using these new skills, you build self-esteem in yourself and your children. When you make mistakes, fix them, learn from them, and go on. Today is a new beginning.

A few good things to remember:(1) learn about adolescent development. (2) remember that teens need reasonable rules set by parents. (3)be flexible; be ready to negotiate the rules. (4) be quick to admit we're not perfect; we parents do not know all the answers,and (5) let's listen with our hearts as well as our ears, love with our heads as well as our hearts, and gradually loosen the ties in order to let our teens grow into independent adults.

PARENT HAVEN THANKS DOROTHY BAILEY FOR WRITING THIS ARTICLE, AND THANKS DR. LOUISE HART FOR REVIEWING AND EDITING ASSISTANCE.

TEENS AND SEXUALITY

It's the stuff jokes are made of - a dad and a son (or a mother and a daughter) sitting down for the "big talk." It's held behind closed doors... usually in a bedroom. "The talk" is approached by the parent with a lump in the throat, cold palms, and damp arm pits. Usually this encounter has been put off for a long time. The talk is about the "birds and the bees." It's about SEX.

Sex is private. Sex can be embarrassing. Sex is hard to talk about, and it's hard to imagine that the little kid whose nose you used to wipe is a sexual person, capable of adult acts.

Professionals who work with families encourage parents to acknowledge their children as sexual beings even when they are infants. Parents of small children can use correct names for body parts, answer questions about reproduction and anatomy honestly, and make pictures, books, and materials available to their children. This kind of early experience makes it easier on the parent when it comes to discussing sexual issues later on. It also helps children, as they grow older, to know that sex is an approachable subject and that they can depend on their parents when they have questions and concerns.

It's not too late. So your child is a pre-teen or adolescent and you haven't had the big talk. Maybe you've tried, only to be met with rolling eyeballs and an "Aw Mom." Perhaps you've never talked about reproduction, so you can't imagine discussing sexuality. What if sex is very private in your home? Just how important is sex education in the home? Is it necessary to discuss sexuality with kids?

Yes it is important to discuss sexuality. And better late than never. Research has shown that in homes where parents are able to discuss sexuality with their children there is a much lower rate of adolescent pregnancy than in homes where it is not discussed. It is not a fact that parents (or schools for that matter) give kids the idea of having sex. Though many kids are misinformed about sexual matters, all kids are aware of sexual issues. It is important that kids get accurate and reliable information about reproduction and sexuality.

There are two main reasons that parents are concerned about adolescent sexuality. The first is the concern that when teens engage in early sex, it might be harmful to them physically, emotionally or psychologically. The other reason is pregnancy. Both of these are legitimate concerns for parents of males and females. Young teens become involved in sex much sooner than most people realize. In a recent study it was found that 14% of all 13 year old boys have had intercourse. Forty five percent of all 16 year old boys have had intercourse. Girls at the same age are less sexually active; 2% of 13 year olds and 32% of 16 year olds are reported to have had intercourse.

Family Communication and Responsibility

Not just for girls. Sex education and discussions are not just for

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girls. Many people think of sexual responsibility as a female thing...boys try and girls try not to. This is a disastrous myth. While a pregnancy may certainly affect a female in more obvious ways, pregnancy and the accompanying responsibilities may confront males with serious problems. Too early sexual activity may also present special emotional and psychological issues for both females and males. It is just as important for boys to understand their changing bodies, reproduction, and sexuality as it is for girls. In our culture it is harder for males to ask sex questions. The notion that males always pursue while females try to resist is wrong. Often it is the girl who does the pursuing. Boys may get caught up in dating or sexual relationships long before they are ready or really want to. (Many parents of boys relate incidents about their young sons in middle school who are constantly called on the phone by girls and are encouraged to be more social than they feel ready to be by their peers.) The attitude that sexual and social concerns are girls issues can be changed. Families can see to it that their sons' feelings and concerns about sexuality are addressed.

Sharing information and values. Most schools offer some kind of sex education. But for many kids and families this classroom training is not enough. Some curricula are very short, and may only offer limited information. There is little consistency in sex education programs. Some instructors are more comfortable than others in working with the sensitive subject matter. In fact, there is no one person who has the responsibility for teaching sex education in the schools...it may be a nurse, a social worker, a home ec teacher or a gym teacher. Few schools have staff specifically trained to teach sex education. Some teens indicate that they had a course in sex education, but at the time it made little difference to them. It's a good idea for parents to check with their children from time to time to make sure that they have the biological information that they need, when they need it. If parents feel uncomfortable about providing accurate information, or are uneasy about such discussions, workshops, books, or help from an adolescent clinic or community agency may be helpful. There are good books which can help parents and teens to find the information that they need.

Many parents want their children to have information presented within the context of a value system which is compatable with that of the family. But schools are faced with the problem of dealing with diverse family values and opinions about these issues and often base their curriculum on factual (and sometimes limited) information only. While many teens indicate that school experience is one of the most valuable resources for learning about sex, families still have the responsibility to make sure that their kids are getting factual information and to help their teens view this information in the context of their own values and behavior.

Parental values and beliefs are important in the formation of teens' own moral and ethical standards. Some parents are distressed to find that their children have different standards than they do. But while parents certainly have an impact upon their children's moral development, all people develop their own morals and standards from other people close to them, from their own experiences, from media, and from living in a community with its own standards. Teens are likely to be dependent upon their peers during the teen years, and to more closely reflect the values of their group of friends rather than the values of their families. Many find that when their children reach early adulthood their values and beliefs shift again and become much like their

own parents'.

Sex information reaches kids in a variety of ways. Movies, lyrics of songs, videos, books, newspapers, and magazines all influence the attitudes and impressions of young people. Peers, adults other than parents, spiritual and religious beliefs, and potential sex partners may all affect the decisions that young people make about sexuality. When parents think about the power of these influences, they may decide that it is important to share their own values and concerns with their children.

Understanding Teenage Sexuality

There are many widely held myths about sexuality. Many adults believe things about sex which just aren't true. Kids hear a lot of untruths too. If teens get all of their information from peers, it is likely that they will have some inaccurate information. Parents may have little direct control over what their teens do. However, they may have a great deal to do with the information that their children have and with the ways that they learn to make decisions.

Sexual Activity ... not necessarily intercourse. Most kids go through stages when they are preoccupied with sex. Teens may spend quite a bit of time, dreaming and thinking and wondering about it. While teens do seem to be having intercourse at an earlier age, many teens postpone intercourse until they are in their twenties, and some wait until they have made permanent commitments. Teens who postpone sexual intercourse do not necessarily postpone all sexual activity. In fact, few do. Being involved in physical relationships during the teen years can be very positive. Adults may be misled by the statistics on teen sexual activity. It is easy for adults to be extremely judgemental about adolescent sexuality... forgetting that most teens have only one sexual partner at a time and that teens are often involved in good, caring and loving relationships. Parents don't really want their children to be non-sexual. The teen years are associated with romance... kissing on the porch, going to a dance, walking hand in hand with someone special. Mostly parents just don't want their children to be hurt or to make decisions or mistakes that may negatively affect their lives.

There is an expectation that the teen years will be special years - a time between kid and adult. There is such rapid change during these years and for teens and their parents adolescence can be stormy and unpredictable. Many people describe their adolescence as being the hardest time of their lives. Teens may, in some ways, be more adult-like than kid-like. Parents of teens may feel confused by the adolescent years too, expecting compliance and independence from their children all at the same time. Kids may be "ready" for adulthood biologically and intellectually, but severely lacking in the life experiences which enable them to act as mature adults. All teens make mistakes; it is inevitable. Years of experience help teens to grow toward making good decisions in their lives including those about relationships, intimacy, and sexuality. Most people continue to learn these lessons all through their lives.

Sometimes very complicated and problematic interpersonal relationships

result from involvement in too-early sexual activity. Sexual relationships may be more difficult than satisfying for teens. Teens who lack good communication and decision-making skills, who have a poor sense of self esteem or who are unable to get accurate information about sexuality are more likely to be confronted by this kind of situation.

Some teenage girls get pregnant intentionally. For some teens it is a way of proving their independence. For others it is a way to get out of a hard living situation: either a group home, foster care, or a difficult family. Other teens want a child so that they can cement a romantic relationship with someone. To others, having a child with someone whom they love seems like the most important thing they can do. It is not unusual for a young woman who has had an abortion to start feeling guilty or sad and decide in her grief that she wants to have another pregnancy in an effort to "make up" for her abortion. There are also a few teens who just want to be parents early.

Some teens are anxious to have children because they want someone who will love them. Most teens who become parents admit that they did not have any idea how demanding being a parent would be. When teens have children they find that they are continuous givers; their babies need and demand lots of care and attention. Most teens are not aware of the special needs and limits of infants and young children until they become parents.

Unfortunately, there are a few young men who get young women pregnant for "macho" reasons. These young men are usually unaware of the responsibilities being a father can involve. Legally, at least 18 years of financial support may be required of the father even when other moral and parenting responsibilities are not taken seriously.

No matter how illogical these reasons may seem to adults and to parents who know how tough parenting can be, they are <u>real</u> to some teenagers. Parents can help to prevent these wanted pregnancies by trying to work with teens to promote planning for the future and to encourage positive thinking about life goals. Some parents encourage their teens to volunteer at day care centers, encourage them to find teen parents who are willing to share their experiences and frustrations, and help them to find ways of nurturing others in an effort to help prevent pregnancy.

It's normal for teens to be indecisive and to feel uncomfortable about sexual issues. Most parents are able to remember some of these experiences from their own teen years. Remember the confusing and surprising feelings which resulted from an innocent friendly touch on the shoulder or a peck on the cheek? Do you remember being shocked by physical feelings that you had never felt before? One of the hardest things for teens to deal with is the strange mixture of feelings and thoughts which may surprise them at unpredictable moments. In a parked car, or at the beach when faced with decisions about what to do sexually, it is really hard ... their minds might say "STOP" while their physical reactions say "GO AHEAD." Parents might decide to share an experience from their own teen years. The sharing of some personal information might really help to open up the lines of communication between parents and kids.

Just when teens start interacting sexually in relationships is very individual. Most parents however, notice the "onset" of adolescence much

earlier than they thought they would. Their children's early interest in the opposite sex is something that often surprises parents. When parents notice the interest, they often become concerned about their children's sexual activity. Parents can provide structure and guidance for children; but realistically, parents can not stop their children from having sexual relationships. No matter how strict or lenient parents are, their child will make his or her own decisions about sexuality. It is important for teens to know that sexual involvement is a matter of decision ... not something that just happens.

Homosexuality and teens. Some adolescents are gay or lesbian. Their sexual reactions and desires may be as much the same as for other teens; however they focus upon people of the same sex rather than of the opposite sex. There is not agreement in research, medical, or social areas on why this happens. A 1981 study of the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research concluded that homosexuality appears to be something a child is born with, not something that happens because of parents, family, or other influences. However, some people believe that homosexuality is a choice, a decision made by an individual. Others believe that all people are capable of being homosexual or heterosexual and that circumstances or incidents influence sexual preference decisions. Many teens feel confused by sexual feelings which they may have for a member of the same sex and conclude that they are gay or lesbian. When this happens, it really scares some teens; for those who have no place to share their concerns, the fear of being homosexual is devastating. Most adolescents experience a crush or a physical reaction towards a teacher or someone they respect of the same sex at one time or another. Generally, it does not mean that they are homosexual. In fact some experts think that the teen years are too confusing to be sure of one's sexual preference.

No matter why a teen is gay or lesbian, that child, just like all teens, needs the continued support, guidance, and care of parents and family members. When parents blame themselves or their children,it is neither fair or helpful. It can be difficult for a family to come to grips with the fact that their teen is homosexual. If this is the case for you, find help and support. You may find reading helpful. Good resources include: "Now That You Know" published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and "Talking with Your Teenager," (pages 80-84), and "Changing Bodies, Changing Lives" both published by Random House. Support groups for gay and lesbian teens and for parents and friends of gays and lesbians exist in Dane County. To contact them, call The United (255-8582).

Preventing Early Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy

Parents can help to prevent very early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. The suggestions which are listed below should be considered while thinking about your own family situation and about your own teens. Your feelings and concerns may change considerably as your child grows older. Which of these things might work for your family? What would you like to try? Almost all of the following can be adapted for different family styles and circumstances.

Be clear about the rules. Some families and parents are very specific about their expectations, and what is allowed. You may feel that there should be no sexual intercourse before marriage. You may feel that co-habitation is better than a too early marriage. You may not allow your kids to sleep with

their partners in your home, while you may feel what they do away is entirely their business. There is so much diversity about what is acceptable for sexual behavior in families. Be clear with your kids about your expectations. If you feel like they are too young for sex, let them know and try to explain why. The rules need to change as children are able to become more responsible for themselves. Parents who are reasonable and flexible about children's rules will find that their kids become better decision makers, and more independent. A parent's ultimate goal is to raise a capable, responsible adult. Parents who are consistently and overly strict and unreasonable run the risk of having children who rebel and refuse to cooperate with family rules, or children who are unable to deal with the adult world.

Provide structures which reinforce your rules. Most parents require that their children keep them informed about where they are and what they are doing. Do you have a curfew rule? Does your child spend lots of time alone? Do you let your kids have people over at your house when there is no adult at home? Do you let your teen go away with friends for weekends? Sometimes kids need a structure which will help them avoid making big mistakes. Though you cannot keep your child from having sexual relationships, you can make it less likely for them to have occasions when they will need to make those kinds of decisions. (When teens are young they especially need this kind of protection; as they get older, you may still want them to let you know where they are just as a self protective caution, or out of courtesy.)

Help provide ways for your teen to get information. Many parents and children are unable to find out about sexuality and reproduction from sensitive and reliable sources. Parents can't be expected to know everything. Do you and your teens have access to people, programs, and resources which can help? Physicians, clinics, and family programs as well as written pamphlets and books will help. If you are not satisfied with the responses you get when you ask, keep asking. You and your teen need to have good information. If your child is unable to ask you for information, where else can he/she go? Some parents feel as if they are good communicators with their kids but realize that their kids might not always feel okay about asking them questions, so they make sure that their children have other resources as well.

Positive models for sexual partners. If all a kid knew about sexual relationships were what he or she got from the movies we would really have problems! Almost all people learn the bulk of their relationship skills from the people who are important in their lives. What we learn about marriage as we are growing up, for instance, is usually based on our experiences of our own parents and their marriages or relationships. Is there concern and caring shown between sexual partners that your child knows? Are there some good models for relationships in your child's life? Does your child see positive caring adults who are concerned for themselves and for others? Is there cooperation among the adults in your family, enabling your child to see sexual partners as individuals who share more in their lives than sex? If it seems appropriate, you might want to talk with your teen about some of the things which are important in your adult relationships, especially the things that are important to you in relating to a sexual partner.

Maintaining a sense of family identity. As children in a family start to get older, becoming less dependent, it is easy for the family structure to begin to dissolve. It's clear that the kids who are growing up don't need

family members to provide the minute-to-minute care that they once needed. Families still have an important role to play by providing a safe, nurturing, and caring place where all the members can share close relationships. A family which is supportive of the growing and changing adolescent can significantly enhance the ability of the teen to make decisions. A family can affect the ways in which kids respond to negative pressures from peers. The family which provides this sort of homelife helps to provide a strong advantage for adolescents as they are faced with the task of becoming adults.

Usually the schedules of families with teens get complicated. Sometimes it is hard to get the family together for a meal, much less the time to build and maintain caring and nurturing relationships. Below are some ways busy family members might try to promote healthy relationships.

- Have regularly scheduled family meetings.
- Let children make some decisions about family activities. As they get older have them help to: make suggestions for family vacations, what to buy for a family gift, how to celebrate someone's birthday.
- Plan special times for eating or sharing time together. Plan time when everyone can be at home. Pay attention to children's and adults' schedules.
- Parents should try to share their <u>own</u> concerns, hopes, goals and dreams. Adolescents need to know their parents as people, not just as parent figures.
- Celebrate <u>small</u> accomplishments.
- Get special treats or surprises for special days ... Valentine cookies? Jack-o-lanterns? Green food on St. Patricks Day?
- Plan "dates" with individual kids. Maybe you could schedule a lunch date when there is no school. Maybe a movie you both would enjoy. How about brunch on Sunday? What about a walk in the woods?
- Write "I care" notes. Tuck them in a pillow or a lunch bag.
- Be spontaneous. Build a snowman, put flowers in your son's bedroom, play "kind tricks" on each other.

<u>Birth Control.</u> Many parents are concerned about discussing birth control with their children. They are worried that the discussion might promote intercourse, giving the impression that they think that pre-martial sex is okay. Other parents may fear that their kids will think that they don't trust them or that parents think they are already involved sexually when they are not. Research indicates that this is probably not what teens think if their parents do discuss birth control.

Recent surveys and studies have shown that in countries where there is easy access to birth control and societal support for everyone to use it, there is much less teen pregnancy. In the United States, however, studies show that most teens think that pre-marital sex is okay, but that using contraception is not. With these facts in mind, it is not surprising that the U. S. has one of the highest pregnancy rates among teens in the world.

It is a hard thing to approach with kids... the fact that while you do not want your son or daughter to be having intercourse, all the same, if they <u>do</u> have intercourse, you want them to take responsibility by using birth control.

You may choose to say something like: "I have strong feelings that teens as young as you are should not have sex. But if you choose to do so, then I expect that you will have sexual relations in a responsible way. I expect that you will use birth control and I will help you to get it." You might also talk to your son or daughter about the responsibility to another person that accompanies having intercourse. What kind of communication might be expected when you choose to have sex with someone? What would happen if birth control didn't work? What about sexually transmitted diseases?

Parents who feel that sex is not a topic for discussion in their families need to look at the facts. Fifty percent of all 18 year olds have had sexual intercourse. Of the two million young women turning 14 this year, 39% of them will become pregnant while still in their teens.

Abstinence as a method of birth control. Abstaining from sexual intercourse is the only sure way to prevent pregnancy. Many families encourage abstinence through the ways they communicate, in the sharing of their family values, and in shared religious beliefs. One half of all 18 year olds abstain from having intercourse. Even when you expect abstinence from your teens it is still important to share information with them. All teens will have times when they are confused, concerned, or need more information on sex. Many teens have close, loving relationships with members of the opposite sex without having intercourse. Does your teen know that? Are you able to share with your teen that just because you expect abstinence from intercourse you don't expect them to be asexual?

What happens if your child is involved in pregnancy?

You may or may not find out about it if your child is involved in a pregnancy. If you do find out, it may be one of the most devastating experiences in your life as a parent. There are a few other situations that can have such lifelong consequences for teenagers and their parents.

Legally, the decision of what to do rests solely with the pregnant teenage girl. Parents may of course offer their advice, but legally the decisions belong first to the mother of the baby and then, when paternity is established, also to the father of the baby.

If you suspect that your child is involved as the father or mother of a baby, speak up! Sometimes teens deny a pregnancy even to themselves. It is not unusual for a parent to guess that their child might be pregnant. See that there is a pregnancy test right away. Early pregnancy testing has three main advantages:

1. If the pregnant teenager is using alcohol or other drugs there will be an early opportunity to restrict usage for the protection of the fetus. It will also enable the teen to improve nutrition or other lifestyle situations which may help to improve the outcome of the pregnancy.

2. Many teens experience high risk pregnancies and low birth weight babies. It is crucial that prenatal care begins early, especially for teens. Early testing will enable teens to get the special medical care that they and their babies need.

3. If the pregnant teen chooses to consider an abortion, there will be enough time to have needed counseling and help in making the decision, and enough time to have an early abortion if that is the decision which is reached.

Pregnancy testing may be done at your doctor's office or at a clinic. The Madison Community Health Center (255-0704) provides free pregnancy testing for teens in Dane County. They also provide educational and clinic resources for young men and women. Planned Parenthood (256-7257) also provides educational and birth control clinics for teens.

Your teenager and abortion. For many people terminating a pregnancy is a moral issue. If your child is faced with an abortion decision, it may be the first time that your teen has really been confronted by an agonizing issue. You may want to encourage your child to have some counseling while considering the decision. If abortion is an option, it is important that questions be answered carefully and honestly, and that the procedures are carefully explained.

Some people look to their churches for guidance when they are considering abortion decisions. Most major denominations have agonized over this issue and many have developed statements about abortion. These statements differ a great deal. If religion is important to your teen, he/ she may find help in discussing the dilemma with a religious leader.

Some pregnancy counseling centers are set up with a major goal of preventing abortions. It is good to know what kind of counseling your child will have before starting sessions. Ask questions before you begin. Most people who are making decisions about pregnancy want facts and a fair representation of all their options. It is important that teens involved in a pregnancy are provided with facts and options which enable them to make their own decisions.

Many people disagree about abortion. People on both sides of the debate agree that there is nothing easy about having an abortion and that it should not be viewed as a desirable method of birth control. All the same, teens who do not use birth control (often because their parents disapprove of using it) sometimes become pregnant and then go on to have abortions. If your child has had an abortion, it is essential that you do everything you can to help her prevent another unwanted pregnancy. Many abortion clinics do not permit more than two abortions in a specific time period. Physically abortion is hard on a young teen's body.

It is essential that teens get care and support following an abortion. Most women experience some grief and some emotional distress and may feel upset for quite some time. Even parents of teens may feel sad and upset and young men who are part of a pregnancy often experience some grief too. Counseling may help deal with the grief which abortion causes a family.

Your teenager and adoption. Twenty years ago, most of the teens who had babies placed them for adoption. Today, most of the teens who have babies choose not to place their babies. There is a growing concern that teens need encouragement to consider adoption as a positive option. Many potential

parents are waiting for children to adopt, and many teen parents are having a tough time raising children, when they are hardly more than children themselves.

Adoption laws are changing and there are several kinds of adoptions possible. Adoptions by relatives, "open" adoptions, and traditional adoptions are all possibilities. Differing sorts of information are shared between birth parents and adoptive parents with different kinds of adoptions. The birth parent may often choose what sort of family will adopt the baby.

The decision to place a child for adoption is very hard. There are advantages to working with an agency in arranging for an adoption. Most agencies have good counseling, and are experienced at helping teens in working through their options. Exploring adoption possiblities with an agency does not mean that the teen cannot change her mind or that she is obligated to the agency in any way.

Adoptions may also be handled by attorneys. Private adoptions are sometimes arranged with people who may assist with medical expenses and other costs, but care should be taken to make sure that legal rights of the birth mother are protected. The adoptive parents should not share the same attorney as the birth parent. In the case of private adoption, it is still a good idea to get counseling for the birth parents. The courts provide protections for all the parties and must act on the legality of the action. In Wisconsin, a home study of all adoptive homes must be held prior to an adoption. When parents place their children for adoption, it must be a decision that they make freely. In fact in court, they must swear that they have made the decision to terminate their parental rights on their own and that they are not being pressured by anyone.

Some teens decide to place their children in foster care while they consider a decision. Others may need to use foster care for a while if they are having a hard time with something. It is appropriate to do this rather than to feel forced to make a hurried decision by the time the baby is born.

Some teens do place their children when they are older. Obviously this can be hard for the teen parent and for the child. When a parent is unable or unwilling to care for a child, the most responsible thing is to enable the child to have parents who are able. The only way to do this permanently is for the birth parent to relinquish parental rights. It is much easier for parents/infant bonding to take place when a child is still an infant, but adoptions of older children are usually successful.

Adoption, like abortion, may bring a sense of loss and grief. The birth parents may find that relinquishing a child for adoption is somewhat like experiencing a death. Young women and men who place children need support and consideration from those close to them. Counseling is helpful for many teens who place children for adoption. Many professionals encourage birth parents to see their children so that it will be easier for them to deal with their loss. Sometimes the birth parents are helped by knowing the adoption agency is very concerned with screening good parents for their children. Placing parents often write a letter to their babies which will be given to them when they are older.

More information on adoption may be obtained from: Jewish Social Services, Catholic Social Services, Lutheran Social Services, Children's Service Society and the State of Wisconsin.

Teen Marriage. Few teens who live in Dane County marry when they become involved in a pregnancy. In most areas of the country, it is much more acceptable to have a child when one is single than it used to be. Marriage does not necessarily provide a baby with a better home than that of a mom or a dad who is single. Teen marriages have a dismal success rate. Teens are better off not marrying when they feel forced to do so. When there is a pregnancy, the young woman and man are usually already undergoing a stressful time and are in the process of making important decisions about the child. A fast decision to marry can bring on many problems while solving few.

Single Parenthood. Most teens decide to keep their babies and to raise them on their own. Younger teens are likely to do this with considerable support from parents. Usually the mother of the baby retains physical custody of the baby, and the parents of the teen mother share their home with her. Some teen parents may live away from the home for a while, in a foster home. Usually there are other problems which that teen or her family need to work out, and they are not usually due just to the birth of the baby or to a pregnancy. When a teen mother's parents are supportive she has a much greater chance of successful completion of school and becoming economically self sufficient than when she moves out on her own before high school completion.

This period of time for the parents of teen parents is often very difficult. Just when the end of their hard parenting years is in sight, there is a baby in the house! There are all kinds of problems which may occur when parents watch their own child try to care for a baby. Grandparents and the teen parent may walk a thin line while they learn ways to negotiate making daily decisions about baby care.

Who is <u>really</u> in charge? If the teen is a minor and the family has adequate income, the grandparents are legally responsible to provide financial support for the baby. The parents of a teenaged young man under 18 may also be held responsible for providing financial support. Unless there is a special legal provision made, the teen parent has complete legal responsibility for the baby. That means the teen parent may make decisions about the child even though his/her parents do not approve of them. Even though the grandparents have financial responsibility they may not have any control over choices made about the baby. This set of circumstances may cause some problems in a family unless there is good communication and understanding between the grandparents and the teen parent.

Teenage Dads. Too often the fathers of babies born to teen moms seem to get lost in the shuffle. The paternal grandparents may also feel as though they have few rights when it comes to caring for their grandchild. As soon as paternity is established, the teen father will be obligated to provide or plan for financial support until the child is 18 years old. Sometimes the wants of the dad seem to be ignored while the mom makes all the decisions. Certainly, if a teen dad should obtain custody of the child, the reverse may be true. (Generally teen dads do not have custody.) The decisions made by a teen mom can have a profound effect upon a young man's life for the next 18 years or more.

It is hard for a young father to establish a relationship with a child when he no longer has a relationship with the child's mother. Many young men want relationships with their children and don't know how to go about forming them. Support for building relationships may come from other dads who have been in similar situations.

Resources for Teen Parents and their Families. If your teen is involved in a pregnancy there is one thing you and your child will both need: support. When parents and teens first learn of a pregnancy, they are usually quite upset. Any parent of a pregnant or parenting teen in Dane County is eligible to use the CONNECT Project. Through this project another parent who has gone through a similar experience will be glad to talk with you.

CONNECT also offers support to teens during pregnancy and parenting. The project offers a support group for young moms that provides a chance to meet others and to share information, resources, and fun. Young parents may also attend meetings at Parents Places with older parents. CONNECT also links teen moms and dads with volunteers who provide one-to-one support. These trained volunteers help teen parents to enhance their children' lives and to make plans for their own futures. CONNECT volunteers may also serve as childbirth coaches, help to provide relief from isolation and assist in other supportive ways. CONNECT is a project of the Family Enhancement Program.

Other social service, medical, and nutritional help programs are available to young parents. There are also special job training and educational programs which may help a parent work towards economic self sufficiency. For more information about CONNECT or other programs, call Family Enhancement at 256-3890.

PARENT HAVEN THANKS PEG SCHOLTES
FOR WRITING THIS ARTICLE.
PEG COORDINATES THE DANE COUNTY ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROJECT
AND IS CO-DIRECTOR OF THE FAMILY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Most of us parents use drugs a good deal: caffeine, tobacco, aspirin, diet pills, alcohol, drugs prescribed by a doctor, etc. For some of us drugs do not seem to cause problems in living, for others drugs cause serious difficulties. Parents of teenagers, when they want to plan for preventing use or abuse of drugs, are urged to work with the following form, copyrighted by PICADA and used by permission.

RULES ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL USE AND YOUR CHILDREN'S USE OF ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS

PERSONAL RULES	RULES ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN'S USE
1. about how much you use (if at all)	1. about how much they use (if at all)
2. about using alcohol & other drugs & driving or riding with a driver who's been using...	2. about using alcohol and other drugs & driving or riding with a driver who's been using...
3. about taking care of a friend who's had too much to drink...	3. about taking care of a friend who's had too much to drink...
4. about using drugs before, during, and/or after work...	4. what are the consequences for breaking your rules about their use?

After you figure out the answers to these questions, will you talk them over with your teenager? Many teenagers do not really know what the rules are about drug use in their family! Communicating with your teenager about various drugs that you use and about drugs that the teenager is exposed to, can help your child form his/her values and make good decisions about drug use.

The following are the drugs most commonly available to teenagers and used by teenagers at this time in Dane County:

Alcohol
Nicotine (cigarettes, snuff, chewing tobacco)
Marijuana
Street stimulants, also called fake speed. This includes pep pills, diet pills, caffeine pills; actual amphetamines (Speed) are no longer commonly available.
Inhalants (glue, gasoline, white-out, nitrous oxide, markers)
Cocaine.

All these drugs are potentially dangerous. Your child probably knows a good deal about them. Try to communicate with your child and learn from the child some of what he/she knows. You need to become at least as knowledgeable as your child. PICADA (251-4558) is a good source of reliable information. Beware of

getting all your information from the popular press, which can be sensational but not very accurate or suitable for local conditions.

Teenagers often use drugs during parties. One way to protect your teenager from encouragement to use drugs is to monitor parties. Do not let your teen attend parties where parents are not present. If you are hosting a teenage party, plan to make the party drug-free. Be aware that it is illegal to offer alcohol to guests under the legal drinking age, and illegal to allow guests to use drugs in your home. You may be brought to court on criminal charges and/or have to pay monetary damages in a civil lawsuit if you furnish alcohol or drugs to minors.

A helpful pamphlet "A Parent's Guide to Teenage Parties" is published by The Wisconsin Clearinghouse, 1954 East Washington Ave, Madison, Wi., 53704 (263-2797). It suggests the following **Guidelines for Parents of Teenagers Attending a Party**: 1)Parents should know where their teenagers will be. Obtain the address and phone number, and let your teen know you expect a phone call if the location of the party changes. 2) Contact the parents of the party-giver. Make sure a parent will be present and that alcohol and other drugs will not be permitted. 3) Know how your teen will get home from the party. 4) Discuss with your teen how to handle a situation where alcohol or other drugs are available at a party. 5) Teens should know what time they are expected to be home. Be awake or have your teen waken you. This can be a good sharing time. 6) If your teen stays overnight with a friend after a party, check with the friend's parents to be sure they want your teen to stay over, and to be sure the parents will be at home.

An organization called SADD (Students Against Drunk Drivers) now has some chapters within high schools. One of their initiatives is encouraging parents and teenagers to sign a **Contract for Life**. The contract can be written in your own words, but the general idea is something like this:

TEENAGER'S CONTRACT	PARENT'S CONTRACT
If I am ever drunk or have used too much of some drug to be a safe driver; or if I am riding with a driver who is in this condition, I promise to call home and ask for help.	If my son/daughter ever calls me in need of safe transportation home, I promise to either come pick my child up and drive him/her home OR I promise to pay for a taxicab for my child in order to prevent a possible auto accident.
Signed_____	Signed_____

The Dane County area offers many different support groups and treatment programs for teenagers and for adults who are experiencing alcohol and other drug related problems. PARENT HAVEN recommends using PICADA as an entry point to find the right service for your family. 251-4558.

RULES, LAWS, AND DISOBEDIENCE

All through the growing years of children, we have to keep teaching the kids about obeying and disobeying. We want our children to mind, and do as we say. But we also want them not to mind when a stranger offers candy and a ride in the car. We want our children to obey the rules of our home, and not to obey certain rules of their peer culture or follow certain models they may admire in the media. We don't actually want obedience to all the rules that adolescents encounter, just obedience to the right rules. Also, most of us want our teenagers to become more and more capable of making good rules and choices for themselves, as adults are expected to do.

Dealing with adolescents who are disobedient to family rules, or who break the law, can be really difficult and puzzling for parents. Family Enhancement Program hears many parents talk about rules and how to enforce rules. There are some techniques that work well for many parents: confronting,-setting consequences, negotiating, and contracting. In the following real life stories, parents used these techniques to deal with two kinds of disobedience: getting home after curfew, and stealing.

Confronting and Setting Consequences for a Curfew Violation

What time should a teenager have to be home in the evening? Most municipalities set a curfew. In Madison, for example, children under 17 are not allowed on "streets, alleys, or other public places" between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m. on Monday through Friday. On Saturday and Sunday nights the hours change: midnight to 4 a.m. If the parent or guardian is with the child, the curfew does not apply.Stoughton and Sun Prairie ordinances set different curfew hours: 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. for anyone under 16, with parental discretion for children over 16.

Families, in addition, set curfews which are comfortable for the parents. When the curfew is broken, parents often impose a consequence, such as "You're grounded for the rest of the week." Grounding seems to be the most commonly used consequence, but it does have one big disadvantage: parents are "grounded" also, because they may have to stay at home to make sure the child stays home! In the following real life story, Andy's parents chose a different consequence.

Andy's Saturday night curfew was 10:30. At 10:30 he came home, and went to his room. At midnight, the father of his girl friend phoned to say "Julia's not home!" Andy's parents checked his room and found the bed stuffed with pillows, and the window open. Later when Andy crawled back through the window he found his angry parents waiting. He explained that he and his girl thought it was important to go to a peace rally together, and "We figured you would not let us stay out that late." (Any parent would have a hard time believing that excuse about the rally, but as it turned out, they really had gone to the rally, an event that the parents approved of in principle.)

Sixteen-year-old Andy was dealing with three conflicting rules here. First,"You have to be in by 10:30." Second,"Your parents want you to be

concerned about peace." Third,"I as a young man am getting mature enough to control my own life." But also Andy had clearly disobeyed and purposely deceived his parents. Andy's father decided on a consequence: 20 hours of unpaid labor at the family business, from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m. for ten days. This was a better consequence than grounding Andy. It was really hard work for him, not just hanging around home and feeling frustrated. And his parents didn't have to stay home every night to make sure he didn't go out.

In a different family, fourteen-year-old John had a 9:30 curfew on weekdays and a 10:30 curfew on week-ends. He had been breaking the curfew, sometimes just a few minutes, sometimes a half-hour, and also he had developed some new friendships Mom didn't approve of. His mother, Dorothy, decided to work out a contract with him. She did some reading about conflicts with teenagers, and liked the idea of looking for WIN/WIN solutions through negotiating. This is a little bit like negotiating a union contract, where the workers ideally give up some of what they want, and get some of what they want, and the management does the same. Dorothy wrote the following section about what she learned and how she used the new ideas with her son.

Negotiating a Contract for a Curfew

The parent(s) and the teen should both have a say in negotiating the terms of the contract. Negotiation is very important because a teen isn't likely to honor a contract which is pre-written by a parent and "plunked down" in front of him/her to sign. Successful negotiations follow specific guidelines:

Step 1. The conflict has to be identified and defined. a) Find a time when your teen is not busy or ready to go somewhere. b) Tell him or her clearly "We have a problem that must be solved." c) Tell your teen, as strongly as you feel, exactly what feelings you have, or what is bothering you. For example, "I get very worried and upset when you break curfew because I don't know where you might be, and I'm afraid something awful has happened to you. I also think it is unfair that I am so upset when you're not home on time." d) Tell your teen that you want him/her to help you reach a solution which is acceptable to both of you. "I think we need to reach an agreement about curfew time. I don't want you to feel I am being unfair, but neither do I want to feel I can't trust you to be home on time. So I think we need to make a contract that will spell out what is fair to both of us."

Step 2. Together, write down several possible solutions. Parents can suggest ideas and so can the teenager. Keep going until you and your teen can think of no more possible solutions. Be careful not to "put down" any solution your teen contributes to the list since this will shut down communications.

Here is the list which John and Dorothy made:

John's List	Dorothy's List
- No curfew	- No going out week nights. 11 p.m. curfew on weekends.
- I can set my own curfew.	- Never be late.
- 1:00 a.m. on weekends, 11:00 p.m. during the week.	- If you're late, phone home.
- Each time is different!	- Weeknights 10 p.m., weekends 11:00.
- I can be late sometimes!	- No exceptions!
- Dances, games, proms shouldn't have curfews.	- Special occasions negotiable.
- Don't nag me about my friends!	- Don't associate with Bill & Phil!

Step 3. Now is the time to evaluate the suggestions - to say which ones you feel are fair or unfair, and why. ("because you might be hurt", "because I'm afraid older kids will help you get into trouble", "because I love you and I worry when you are out after curfew".) You teen has the same opportunity to evaluate your solutions ("all the other kids get to stay out later", "don't you trust me?", "Mom, times have changed since you were my age".)

Step 4. Narrow the solutions down to one or two that you can agree on. Here is the list that John and his Mom agreed upon.

a. Curfew. The weeknight curfew is 10:00 p.m. The weekend curfew is 11:00 p.m. If John is late, he will call before curfew time and say where he is and what time he expects to be home.

b. Exceptions. Special occasions will be talked over ahead of time, but curfew is generally 1 1/2 hours after a prom, 1 hour after a school dance, and 1 hour after a game.

c. Friends. The question of friends does not belong in this contract. John and Mom are not making a contract about friends, but only about curfew. They decided to schedule a time to talk about friends later.

Step 5. Consequences and bonuses are part of a contract. The contract should state the terms of the agreement and also the terms of the consequences and bonuses. It is a good idea to negotiate the consequences and bonuses in the same way you negotiated the solutions.

John's list of consequences	Dorothy's list of consequences
- Grounding for ever.	- No games or dances rest of semester.
- Loss of phone privileges.	- Grounding one evening for each 5 minutes late.
- A good scolding is ok but please don't nag!	- If John phones home, grounding one evening for each 15 minutes late.
- No refrigerator raids.	- No telephone calls or friends over.
- No games or dances the next week.	

John's List Of Bonuses

- Double my allowance
- An all-night pizza party
- Tickets to a Rock Concert
- New set of drums

Dorothy's List of Bonuses

- Hugs and kisses
- Can sleep past noon on Saturdays
- Increase allowance by 25 cents each night curfew is kept
- Best friend, Dan, can sleep over

Here is the finished contract, which is now taped to the refrigerator where John and is Mom can both see it often.

CONTRACT

Names of parties to this contract: John and Mom

Goals: John is to keep a 10:00 curfew on week nights, and a 11:00 p.m. curfew on weekends. If John is late, he will call before curfew, say where he is and what time he expects to be home.

Bonuses: For each night John adheres to the terms of the contract, his Mom will increase his allowance by 50 cents. If John adheres to this contract for a two-week period without breaking it, he will receive an additional bonus, namely, a trip to Pizza Hut with his best friend, Dan, for one deep-dish sausage and pepperoni pizza to be paid for by Mom.

Consequences: If John is late, but calls, grounding is one evening for each 15 minutes he is late. If John is late and does <u>not</u> call, grounding is as above, <u>plus</u> no phone calls or friends over during the grounding time. If Mom does not adhere to the contract, that is, if she tries to change the curfew rules, or if she nags, she must give up an evening of watching the Bill Cosby Show.

*DATE*_____ *SIGNED*_____

(John) *(Mom)*

Notes: Putting a time limit on bonuses and consequences makes them more concrete to the child. Also, contracts need to be evaluated and re-negotiated if they don't seem to be working, and also as your child grows older. For example a contract made with a 14 year old boy will not be suitable when the boy is sixteen and has his driver's license.

Confronting Criminal Behavior

Breaking a curfew ordinance,or running away, are not criminal behaviors. They are status offenses, actions that are not forbidden for adults but only for children. But such actions as vandalism (destroying property) and stealing are criminal behaviors. For some teenagers, criminal behavior becomes one way to test their degree of independence from parents. "How important is this law to my parents? Do my parents care enough about me, and about the law, that they will really insist?" For example, during his teen years John got into trouble a number of times for vandalism. He remembers:"Every time, the police would bring me home and talk to my Dad. He would bawl me out and yell and say never to do that stuff. And maybe we would go to court. But then it would be all over. He would never mention it again until the next time. We never discussed it. He didn't seem to know anything about what I was doing with my time, and he didn't seem to care. I just was supposed to stay out of trouble. I don't think the way my Dad handled it was good. I think he should have paid more attention to me when I was not in trouble. I got the idea that he didn't really give a damn what I did, and he didn't think it really made any difference if I broke down somebody's fence, either."

Stealing, especially shoplifting, is an antisocial behavior that some teenagers get into very deeply, especially when they are so unfortunate as not to get caught promptly. The police and the juvenile court system generally deal with shoplifting in a rather slow and unexcited process when an adolescent is caught for the first time. Parents need to make their disapproval of shoplifting very clear and very strong, rather than to depend on the law to handle a situation.

When a parent suspects shoplifting or other stealing, a child will often say "Don't you trust me, Dad?" This can become a real barrier to solving the situation, because Dad wants to be fair, and wants to trust his child. It is not necessary to let the question of trust stop the investigation! For example:

Confronting a Child About Stealing

Rob is a teen-ager now. But just a few years ago he was an impulsive 5th grader who stole a portable tape recorder from his school and sold it to a classmate for $8.00 in order to buy himself a knife which his parents had said he could not have.

Rob's Mom discovered the $8.00 in his room while making his bed. Knowing he should not have that amount of money (since he had spent his allowance), she confronted him about the money that evening.

Mom: "Rob, I found $8.00 in your room today. I'd like to know where you got it." (Rob's face turned pale, then red.)

Rob: "A kid gave it to me."

Mom: "You say a kid gave it to you. Who gave it to you?"

Rob: "I don't know, some kid at school, one of my friends."

Mom: "Some kid at school gave you $8.00. What was his name?"

Rob: "Dunno." (Rob turned sullen and would not look at Mom.)

Mom: "Rob, I think you took the money from someone. I need to know where you got it so you can return it right away."

Rob: "Mom, I didn't take no money!"

Mom: "Rob, if you didn't take the money, how did you get it?"

Rob: "I sold something."

Mom: "What did you sell?"

Rob: (Looking scared..) "Something I found at school."

Mom: "What did you find, Rob?"

Rob: "Just an old tape recorder."

Mom: "It must have been in good shape if you got $8.00 for it. Where did you find it?"

Rob: "On the playground."

Mom: "You needed to turn it in at the office, Rob. It wasn't yours to keep. Do you agree?"

Rob: "I guess so.."

Mom: "Now we need to plan what to do. First we have to get the tape recorder back from whoever you sold it to. Who was it?"

Rob: "Kent."

Mom: "We're going to call Kent right away and give him his money and get the tape recorder. Tomorrow you and I will turn it in to the principal's office."

Rob's Mom was not feeling calm. She felt angry, and unsure that maybe she was accusing Rob unjustly. So it was hard for her to confront him this way. But she believed that if she didn't "nip it in the bud" Rob would not learn how important it was to be honest. And she believed Rob would probably steal again if he got away with it this time.

Rob and his Mom went to Kent's house that evening, gave Kent the $8.00, and retrieved the tape recorder. The next morning she and Rob took the tape recorder to the principal. There, she learned that Rob had not found the recorder on the playground. Instead, he had stolen the tape recorder from his classroom.

Rob - by himself - was made to take the tape recorder to his teacher before class. The embarrassment he felt that day lasted for weeks, and was an

effective consequence for him. Rob's Mom was equally embarrassed, but glad as time went by that she had "forced the issue". Rob, as far as she knows, has not stolen again.

The Mom in this true story did a number of very positive things: she was assertive, she was persistent, she followed through, she made sure her child made restitution for the theft. Even with older children who steal, a parent can follow the same process. Teenagers should not be protected from the consequences of stealing. Even if the police are involved (for example, if the child is caught shoplifting at a store and is arrested), parents need to be actively involved. Children should not be allowed to enjoy the possession of stolen goods just because a theft cannot be proved in court.

One mother who found 7 brand new outfits in her daughter's room was unable to get any information from the child, beyond some vague statements like "I saved the money from my allowance" and "Some kids gave it to me." This Mom bundled up all the clothes and took them to Goodwill as a gift. She told her daughter: "I will not allow you to have clothing unless I can believe you got it in some honest way. You cannot have my trust unless you show me you are trustworthy."

In Dane County, one program that has a positive record of helping teenagers who steal and vandalize is Youth Restitution. If your child is a repeat offender he or she may be ordered to this program. However, you as a parent can possibly head off repeat offenses by confronting your child the very first time you suspect criminal behavior,and by insisting the child work hard to repay the theft or the damage done.

A reminder: the following are the techniques suggested in this article.

C O N F R O N T I N G

S E T T I N G C O N S E Q U E N C E S

N E G O T I A T I N G & W R I T I N G A C O N T R A C T

PARENT HAVEN THANKS DOROTHY BAILEY FOR RESEARCH AND WRITING OF THIS SECTION

ADOLESCENTS AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Some adolescents are able to develop emotionally in a fairly steady and uneventful process. But that is the exception. For most teens and preteens it is a time of emotional upheaval. An easygoing child may become edgy and easily upset. An open and communicative child may become reticent and moody. Anxious, or depressed, or unhappy, or belligerent behavior may appear without any reasons that are clear to parents.

The emotional changes of adolescence usually result from three different developmental reasons: 1)the physical and hormonal changes of puberty, 2)the need of teenagers to become increasingly independent, and 3) the need to decide on their own values and standards in the midst of conflicting pressures from friends and the culture.

Parents cannot prevent adolescent emotions, or eliminate the ups and downs of the teen years. What we can try to do is to remain available when a child wants to talk, without getting too emotional ourselves, too caught up in our son or daughter's extremes.

But what about <u>serious</u> emotional problems? How can a parent know if a child needs professional help? When can I feel safe saying "This is just teenage turmoil and we'll all get through it?" Or when should I rush to the phone and call for help? Here are some things that point to the possibility of serious emotional problems:

- the problem has gone on for a long time
- the problem is getting in the way of a child's everyday life
- nothing and no one seems to be able to help
- the child is destructive to others
- the child is self-destructive, actually hurting himself/herself, or threatening suicide.

Signs of serious depression or emotional disturbance can include the following:

- <u>Changes in sleeping habits.</u> Sleeping, regularly, more than 10 hours a day. Widely erratic sleep patterns. Lots of trouble getting to sleep at all.
- <u>Eating disorders.</u> Dramatic weight gains or dramatic weight losses, signs of vomiting, severe loss of appetite, bizarre food fetishes. These may be indicators of anorexia or bulimia.
- <u>Persistent and marked withdrawal.</u> Frequent truancy, a marked change for the worse in school achievement, no friends, giving up activities that used to be fun, being "shut off" from family for extended times.
- <u>Acting out.</u> Afraid of everything, or always seeking dangerous thrills, sexually out of control, shoplifting more than once, running away, getting into bad physical fights, verbally abusing others severely, accident prone. Or suffering physical symptoms that might be from emotional stress, such as headaches, back aches, just feeling ill a lot.
- <u>Hallucinations, hearing "voices", delusions.</u> These symptoms may be drug-related, or may be signs of an emotional illness.

What can a parent do, who suspects serious emotional problems? Some parents have found help from one or more of these approaches.

Keep trying to talk with the child. Be persistent and loving. Make an effort to communicate how you are feeling. "I feel just terribly distressed about you. I feel so concerned I am almost sick about this."

Discuss with other adults who know the child. Friends, teachers, or relatives can tell you what they think, and perhaps support your efforts to help.

Spend more time with the child. When the situation seems very severe, a parent sometimes even will need to give up work for a time and stay at home.

Try to change the child's environment. Consider whether a new school, living with a relative for a while, or other extreme changes might help.

Accept the child as he/she is. This could mean a very difficult change in what parents have been unwilling to accept. For example, "It's ok if you don't get good grades." "It's ok if you're in love with someone I don't approve of." "It's ok if you're gay."

Find professional help. This could mean a careful physical exam, because problems which appear to be "emotional" may result from physical disorders. For example:

> Anna was a 14-year old high school freshman, with good grades and a positive attitude toward school, when she began menstruating. Her behavior changed dramatically, with truancy, feeling ill, anger outbursts, disobedience, antagonism to her parents. Several months of therapy, and careful attention from her physician, were somewhat helpful but the problems remained quite severe, and her parents considered filing a truancy petition with the juvenile court. Eventually Anna and her mother, by charting her symptoms in relation to her menstrual cycle, determined that Anna was possibly suffering from Premenstrual Syndrome. A gynecologist agreed, and supported Anna in diet changes and medications that proved very helpful.

Professional help could also be primarily psychological, through individual therapy, group counseling, or family meetings. For example:

> Ron was an 11th grader in a public school system that asks every student to take part in an annual brief test which picks up signs of possible depression in kids. Ron's test replies indicated he might be quite depressed. When interviewed by a school counselor, he revealed that he was sleeping poorly, not eating well, feeling very concerned about his parents' marriage problems, and had recently been involved in an auto accident which he had not told anyone about. With cooperation between the school and Ron's parents, this teenager participated with other kids in several group sessions with a therapist who specializes in helping with depression.

For information about finding professional help, see the section in this handbook called "Looking for Counseling or Therapy." Or, if you are feeling frightened for your teenager and cannot immediately reach your physician, call the Dane County Mental Health Center at 251-2345. This 24 hour telephone line is for crisis intervention and suicide prevention. The crisis counselors can try to help you get some perspective on the situation, and decide what resources you can obtain immediately if they believe suicide is a danger at this time.

When your teenager is in emotional stress, try not to go crazy yourself. Find a little relaxation or fun in your life when you can. Lean on your friends, as you would want them to lean on you in their own times of trouble. Find a parent support group. Say to yourself, "our family will live through this, we will find a way".

Probably your teenager will recover from this emotional storm and regain the ability to enjoy a normal life. But recognize that emotional illness can sometimes be lifelong. For example, both schizophrenia and manic depressive illness can strike during the teen years; these illnesses may have but a single episode, or they can become chronic.

Should your child become chronically emotionally ill, of course you will grieve terribly, as a parent always grieves about a child's handicaps. However, there have been dramatic advances in the treatment of some of the major mental illnesses. Your child's illness, even if chronic, may respond well to medication or other careful management. You will need to search out a psychiatrist or other professional whom you can trust and who will work cooperatively with you.

The Wisconsin Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI) sponsors a support group for parents whose children (up to age 18) are seriously mentally ill; for information about the group call them at 257-5888. The Dane County AMI provides information and support primarily to adult mentally ill persons and their families. Call them for more information: 255-1695. Consider becoming a member in order to receive their fine newsletter and also to be in touch with other families that are dealing with mentally ill family members.

SOME OF THE IDEAS IN THIS ARTICLE ARE TAKEN FROM A BOOK
BY RUTH BELL & LENI ZEIGER WILDFLOWER,
"TALKING WITH YOUR TEENAGER: A BOOK FOR PARENTS",
PUBLISHED IN 1983 BY RANDOM HOUSE

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Family Enhancement Program

CHILD ABUSE AND OTHER FAMILY VIOLENCE

In most families with teenagers, there is certainly some verbal violence. Some families yell a lot, most parents probably yell at each other and their kids sometimes. What parents say to teenagers can be very hurtful, especially if it's all criticism: "You're stupid, you're bad, you'll never amount to anything."

A good many families also use physical violence. Physical violence: "Do as I say or I'll spank you", or "You used to hit me when I was a kid, now it's my turn". Or, "I feel angry because I had a hard day, so I'll hit you." Or even, "It seems as if I don't have any power at all outside my family, so I'll show them I'm in charge here!" It is really easy to get locked into being violent, because it seems to get quick results. However violence also can have some long-term results such as resentment, hatred, and feelings of being worthless.

In some families, there is sexual abuse: "I am more powerful than you, and I can make you take part in sexual activities." Teenage girls are among the most likely victims of sexual abuse within families, but adolescent boys are also abused in some families. Sexual abuse has serious, long-term effects on children's feelings about themselves and about family members. The adolescent who is being sexually abused today may carry guilt, low self-esteem, and painfully confused feelings throughout a lifetime.

Wisconsin law says that it is illegal to abuse children, and the law defines what is meant by child abuse and by child neglect. Information about the law is printed in the article that follows this one.

In this article are four real life stories about families that experienced some degree of violence, with some comments about how each one might be handled under Wisconsin law.

"I slapped my 16-year-old daughter across the face a few months ago. She was being really mouthy about staying out after curfew. I don't usually hit the kids, but I had really had it. When my hand hit her lip, her teeth made a cut inside her mouth. Next day, she phoned Social Services and reported me for child abuse! What a mess! I had to go to court, go to a psychiatrist....a whole year of supervision. It was really awful and I don't think it was fair at all. But I will admit that our family got some good help out of a bad situation. For one thing, I found out that my drinking was affecting my children. I have got a lot of help from Alcoholics Anonymous, and also from Parent Haven. Things are going a lot better at home."

At Parent Haven meetings, we have heard a number of stories like this. Children are informed in school that it is not legal for parents to abuse their children. Sometimes, a child will report abuse and a social worker or the court will decide after investigation that abuse did not occur, because what happened was reasonable discipline. The law does not state that parents are forbidden to spank a child or use other physical punishment. What is not legal is to injure a child.

> "When I was growing up, there was a lot of physical punishment in our family but there also was a lot of physical affection and playing. We got spanked on the bottom with hand, hairbrush - but only on the bottom. I never thought it was fair, but didn't think of my Mom as abusive. Now, I think she punished physically because of her own stress - when she was mad. Spanking was not really a last resort for my parents - I just don't think they knew any other way to discipline. In general the whole family was physical - affection and spanking very common.....A couple of times with one of my brothers I remember being scared because Mom was enraged and spanked long and hard enough so it was more like a beating. With my own children, I have made a rule for myself that I will not spank at all. I'm scared I could really hurt them when I get mad."

Would the mother in this story be guilty of child abuse under Wisconsin law? If someone reported her actions the time she spanked so long and hard, there probably would have been an investigation, at least. Some children who grow up in a family like this one raise their children the same way they were raised, believing the punishment was good for them. Other people who were raised with physical punishment believe very strongly that it is better not to spank children.

It is really difficult for parents to know what is the best way to discipline their children. Parents usually may copy the way they were raised, or else react against the way they were raised and try to do everything differently. When parents look for guidance about discipline, they find a lot of conflicting ideas. Some Bible-believing parents think they ought to use physical punishment because there is an Old Testament proverb that says "Spare the rod and spoil the child". Other people think the Bible brings a message about peace and gentleness that is more powerful than the message about spanking. Child development researchers have identified a good many negative effects that physical punishment has produced in children. Almost all parents, as well as experts, agree that severe physical punishment is harmful. And Wisconsin law agrees.

It seems as if most families do some spanking when children are quite small, and then do less and less physical punishment as children get older. Probably physical punishment of children older than 12 is fairly uncommon. A beating administered to a teenager by a well-intentioned parent can sometimes have very harmful effects, as in the true story that follows.

"My father gave me a beating with a heavy belt one time for something I didn't do. It left deep physical scars on my back and emotional scars that I have not totally resolved. My father thought he was doing the right thing because that was the way he was brought up. I have learned there are many more effective and less brutal ways to discipline. To discipline is to <u>teach with love</u> and this, to me, is more effective than to use hate and violence."

What are some of those "more effective and less brutal ways to discipline" that the person mentions above? These are some of the ways we have heard mentioned by parents at Parent Haven.

- spending more time with teenagers
- listening and talking with a teen about a situation
- family meetings to discuss rules
- written contracts signed by the teen and by parent
- postponing driver's license
- penalties, such as jobs to do without pay
- refusing use of family car
- calling the police.

When there has been violence toward children in a family, it often turns into violence toward their parents when the children are teenagers and are stronger. Or, it seems as if sometimes one of the parents almost encourages the teenagers to hurt the other parent, as in the next story.

"My teenage children hit me, pull my hair, and twist my arms. They tell me I am a jerk and a nothing. My husband just says 'You shouldn't nag them.' He goes downstairs so he doesn't really see what they do. I feel so angry. I don't understand this. I need my husband to help me so I don't get bruises. I just feel like killing myself. Other parents in my support group told me to call the police, so now I do. The police do help some, but I need my husband to help me."

What is the law about situations like this? It does not seem to be as forceful as the child abuse law. Some law enforcement officers prefer to leave a situation like this pretty much alone, perhaps saying "Well, that's an odd family. That father just needs to take charge." A different officer may take a stronger position and be more helpful by talking very firmly to the teenagers. If the parent can show actual bruises or other injuries, a teenager may be taken into custody and charged with battery.

If violence is a problem in your family, there are a number of different community resources in addition to the police, sheriff, and social services. They include:

P.A. (Parents Anonymous), support groups for parents who want to gain control

over their abusive tendencies. 251-9464.

Oasis, intervention and support groups for children, teenagers, and adults who are involved with sexual abuse in their families. 251-9464.

Dane County Advocates for Battered Women, counseling and temporary shelter. 251-4445.

Family Service, a counseling center which provides programs for men who are violent, to assist them in finding other ways to handle their angry feelings. 251-7611.

Parent Haven, a support group for parents of teenagers who want a place to talk about family issues, and get ideas from other parents. 256-3890.

When everyday problems pile up, don't take it out on your kid. Try any or all of these alternatives:

1. Stop in your tracks. Step back. Sit down.
2. Take five deep breaths. Inhale. Exhale. Slowly, slowly.
3. Count to 10. Better yet, 20. Or say the alphabet out loud.
4. Phone a friend. A relative. Even the weather.
5. Still mad? Punch a pillow. Or munch an apple.
6. Thumb through a magazine, newspaper, photo album.
7. Do some sit-ups.
8. Pick up a pencil and write down your thoughts.
9. Take a hot bath. Or a cold shower.
10. Lie down on the floor, or just put your feet up.
11. Put on your favorite record.
12. Water your plants.

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Take time out. Don't take it out on your kid.

SECTION III:

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

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PARENTS AND CHILD ABUSE

There are three separate areas of law which will result in parents becoming involved with the legal system based on things they have done to their children. The first of these is the reporting statutes, the second is juvenile court jurisdiction, and the third is criminal charges.

I. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Children's Code requires professionals having "reasonable cause to suspect" that a child under 18 has been abused or neglected or threatened with injury to report that to the police, sheriff, or Dane County Department of Social Services (DCDSS). If the person making the investigation decides the child needs immediate protection, the child may be taken into custody.

Abuse is defined as: (1) physical injury inflicted by other than accidental means; (2) sexual abuse; (3) sexual exploitation; (4) permitting or requiring a child to be a prostitute; and (5) emotional damage exhibited by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or outwardly aggressive behavior for which the parent fails to obtain the necessary treatment.

Neglect is defined as failure, refusal, or inability for reasons other than poverty, to provide the necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care, or shelter so as to endanger the physical health of the child.

Parents should be aware that a professional, i.e., doctor, nurse, social worker, teacher, daycare worker, etc., is likely to report anything at all suspicious because failure to report can result in a fine of $1000 or six months in jail or both. In addition, any individual may anonymously report suspected abuse or neglect to DCDSS. This means DCDSS gets a large number of reports, many of which turn out to be unfounded, but which nevertheless must be investigated.

The investigator, whether it be a social worker or a police officer, has a great deal of discretion; two individuals may look at identical facts in a different way. The police have 12 hours after a complaint is filed to investigate and DCDSS has 24 hours to investigate. Within sixty days they are to make a determination as to whether or not there has been any abuse or neglect. A parent is entitled to have a report of that determination. The decision may result in the filing of a CHIPS petition in juvenile court.

II. JUVENILE COURT

The Children's Code describes 13 situations in which the juvenile court can take jurisdiction over children alleged to be in need of protection and services (CHIPS). A person, usually a social worker, can bring a petition on behalf of any child under 18. Petitions can allege the child: (1) has been the victim of sexual or physical abuse; (2) has been neglected; or (3) is suffering from emotional damage for which the parent is unwilling to provide treatment. The parent may also request court involvement if he or she is "unable to care for, or control, or provide necessary special care and treatment for the child. A child over 12 may sign a petition requesting court jurisdiction on the basis that he or she is in need of special care and treatment, which the parent is unwilling to provide. Truancy and running away

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are other frequent grounds for court jurisdiction.

If the court makes a CHIPS finding, it may order supervision by the DCDSS for up to one year, counseling and other treatment, or placement outside of the home. The judge, as well as the social worker who recommends a disposition to the court, is to act in the best interests of the child. The focus is on the child, not the parent. Parents can influence but not control the outcome of juvenile court actions. Parents may retain a lawyer of their own or if indigent, request a public defender be appointed to represent their interests at any point in the legal process.

III. CRIMINAL STATUTES

There are three criminal statutes that relate to the actions of parents toward their children. These are: (1) abuse of children; (2) sexual exploitation of children; and (3) contributing to the delinquency or neglect of children.

A parent who abuses a child under 16 can face criminal charges, punishable by a fine of $10,000 or two years in prison or both. Child abuse is defined as torture or cruel maltreatment, i.e., severe bruising, lacerations, broken bones, burns, internal injuries, or injuries constituting great bodily harm. Recent case law further states that cruel maltreatment is not limited to physical injury, but also includes conduct "abhorrent to the sensitivities of the general public."

Contributing to the delinquency of a child is defined as encouraging or, by neglect or disregard of the child, contributing to the child's violation of state or federal criminal law. If an adult is convicted under this law, he or she can be fined up to $10,000 or imprisoned for 9 months or both.

Sexual exploitation of children is defined as a person knowingly involving a child under 18 in "sexually explicit conduct" for the purposes of photographing, displaying, or selling it. This is punishable by a $10,000 fine or 10 years in prison or both.

If a parent is charged with any of these crimes, retaining a lawyer or public defender is essential.

PARENT HAVEN THANKS ATTORNEY BONNIE L. BLOCK FOR WRITING THIS ARTICLE.

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THE CHILDREN'S CODE

Chapter 48 of the Wisconsin Statutes (the State laws) is known as the Children's Code. - Some of the purposes of the Children's Code are to ensure the legal rights of all parties involved, to protect the healthy mental and physical development of children while preserving family unity whenever possible, and to provide for rehabilitation, not punishment, for children who commit delinquent acts. The interests of all parties are considered, but the best interest of the child will always be the most important consideration of the court.

The Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over: a) children alleged to be delinquent, that is, a child who is 12 years old or older but less than 18 who has violated State or criminal law; b) children alleged to be in need of protection and services (CHIPS) which can be ordered by the court for the following reasons:

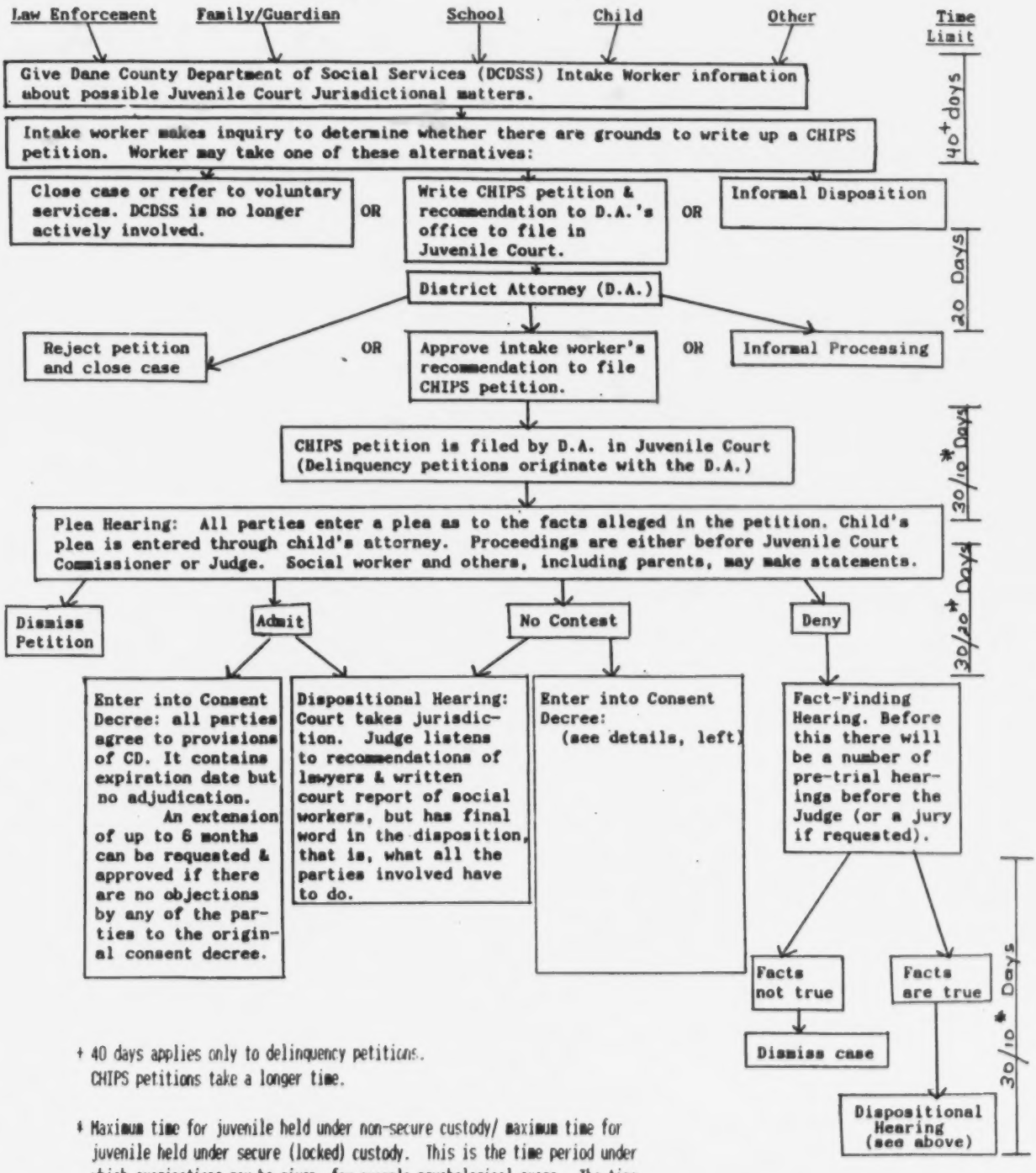
1. Child is without a parent or guardian.
2. Child has been abandoned.
3. Child has been the victim of sexual or physical abuse, including injury which is self-inflicted or inflicted by other than accidental means.
4. Child's parent or guardian signs the petition requesting jurisdiction and states that he or she is unable to care for, control or provide necessary special care or special treatment for the child.
5. Child has been placed for care or adoption in violation of law.
6. Child is habitually truant from school, after evidence is provided by the school attendance officer that the activities under s. 118.16 (5) have been completed.
7. Child is habitually truant from home and either the child or a parent or guardian or a relative in whose home the child resides signs the petition requesting jurisdiction and attests in court that reconciliation efforts have been attempted and have failed.
8. Child is receiving inadequate care during the period of time a parent is missing, incarcerated, hospitalized or institutionalized.
9. Child is at least age 12, signs the petition requesting jurisdiction and attests in court that he or she is in need of special treatment which the parent, guardian, or legal custodian is unwilling to provide.
10. Child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian neglects, refuses, or is unable for reasons other than poverty to provide necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care, or shelter, so so as to seriously endanger the physical health of the child.
11. Child is suffering emotional damage for which the parent or guardian is unwilling to provide treatment, which is evidenced by one or more of the following characteristics exhibited to a severe degree: anxiety, depression, withdrawal or outward aggressive behavior.
12. Child, being under 12 years of age, has committed a delinquent act as defined in s. 48.12.
13. Child has not been immunized as required by s. 140.05 (16) and not exempted under s.140.05 (16) (c).

If a child appears in court, alleged to be delinquent or in need of protection and services, and appears to be developmentally disabled, mentally ill, alcoholic, or drug dependent, the court will proceed under different rules (statutes).

Should you as a parent want to have a CHIPS petition filed, or find yourself involved with the Juvenile Court in some way, the following flow chart will help you understand how the process works.

Following the flow chart are selected topics about juvenile court procedures. It should be emphasized that the purpose of these pages is to highlight how the process works with a focus on the CHIPS petition, and that these pages don't represent the entire statutes. Please refer to the statutes for more detail. The Wisconsin Statutes are available in the public library.

CHIPS INTAKE AND JUVENILE COURT PROCESS


Law Enforcement
Family/Guardian
School
Child
Other
Time Limit
Give Dane County Department of Social Services (DCDSS) Intake Worker information about possible Juvenile Court Jurisdictional matters.
Intake worker makes inquiry to determine whether there are grounds to write up a CHIPS petition. Worker may take one of these alternatives:
40+ days
Close case or refer to voluntary services. DCDSS is no longer actively involved.
OR
Write CHIPS petition & recommendation to D.A.'s office to file in Juvenile Court.
OR
Informal Disposition
20 Days
District Attorney (D.A.)
Reject petition and close case
OR
Approve intake worker's recommendation to file CHIPS petition.
OR
Informal Processing
CHIPS petition is filed by D.A. in Juvenile Court (Delinquency petitions originate with the D.A.)
30/10* Days
Plea Hearing: All parties enter a plea as to the facts alleged in the petition. Child's plea is entered through child's attorney. Proceedings are either before Juvenile Court Commissioner or Judge. Social worker and others, including parents, may make statements.
30/20* Days
Dismiss Petition
Admit
No Contest
Deny
Enter into Consent Decree: all parties agree to provisions of CD. It contains expiration date but no adjudication.
An extension of up to 6 months can be requested & approved if there are no objections by any of the parties to the original consent decree.
Dispositional Hearing: Court takes jurisdiction. Judge listens to recommendations of lawyers & written court report of social workers, but has final word in the disposition, that is, what all the parties involved have to do.
Enter into Consent Decree:
(see details, left)
Fact-Finding Hearing. Before this there will be a number of pre-trial hearings before the Judge (or a jury if requested).
Facts not true
Facts are true
Dismiss case
30/10* Days
Dispositional Hearing (see above)

+ 40 days applies only to delinquency petitions. CHIPS petitions take a longer time.

* Maximum time for juvenile held under non-secure custody/ maximum time for juvenile held under secure (locked) custody. This is the time period under which examinations may be given, for example psychological exams. The time limit of 30/20 days may be extended to allow sufficient time for examinations. Time limits still apply for children who are not in physical custody outside the home but instead remain at home with parents.

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SELECTED TOPICS ABOUT JUVENILE COURT PROCEDURES

I. Provisions of Law for Taking a Child into Custody

A. Definitions of custody and holding facilities

"legal custody": A legal status created by the order of a court which gives the right and duty to protect, train and discipline the child, and to provide food, shelter, legal services, and ordinary medical and dental care. Parents may retain some rights: for example, the right to consent to a child's marriage or to surgery.

"legal custodian": A parent or guardian, or an agency granted legal custody of the child by the court. Parents usually retain legal custody, even if the court takes physical custody. If parents do retain legal custody, they continue to have the same rights and responsibilities even though their child is living outside their home.

"physical custody": Actual, physical custody of the child.

"secure detention facility": A locked facility approved under section 46.16 for the secure, temporary keeping in custody of children.

"shelter care facility": A non-secure place of temporary care and physical custody for children, licensed under section 48:66.

B. Custody

A child can be taken into custody by a law enforcement officer for:

1. Child has run away.
2. Child is in immediate danger from surroundings and removal is necessary.
3. Child violated terms of court-ordered supervision or after-care supervision.
4. Child violated terms of state or federal law, or local ordinance. (Examples: curfew violation, underage drinking, shoplifting, etc.) OR
5. A warrant for the child's apprehension has been issued.

The law enforcement officer taking the child into custody must attempt to notify the parent, guardian, and legal custodian. When a child is turned over to an intake worker, this person will continue the attempt to notify. A child cannot be placed in secure detention (a locked facility approved for keeping children in temporary physical custody) until an intake worker interviews the child in person.

C. Release

If the child is not held under secure custody, the child must be released as soon as is reasonably possible to a parent, guardian, or legal custodian, or to a responsible adult. If a child is 15 years old or older, the child may be released without immediate adult supervision.

In the case of runaways, the child may be released to a home authorized under sec. 48.227. If the parents do not consent to the temporary care of the child at the runaway home, a hearing shall be conducted before a judge or a Juvenile Court commissioner within 24 hours of the time the child enters the runaway home, excluding Saturday, Sunday and legal holidays. (If the child has not been taken into custody, and both the child and the parent, guardian, or legal custodian agree to temporary care services at a runaway home, no hearing is required.) During a child's stay at a runaway home, a parent, guardian or legal custodian may talk with the child and the home's staff. If both the runaway home and the child consent, the child may stay there for up to 20 days.

If the child is suffering from a serious physical condition which requires prompt treatment or diagnosis, the child may be taken to a hospital.

D. Keeping a Child in Temporary Physical Custody

Physical custody can be either secure (locked) or non-secure. It may be the home of a parent, guardian, relative, or person who is not a relative, or a licensed foster home or group home, or a licensed public shelter, or a public treatment facility for emergency treatment.

A child can be placed temporarily in secure detention under any of the following conditions, as determined by the intake worker.

1. The child probably committed a delinquent act, and either is likely to run away or is likely to do physical harm to another person.
2. The child appears to be a fugitive from another state or has run away from a secured correctional facility.
3. The child is in physical danger from another person, and consents in writing to be in secure custody for protection, and such custody is ordered by a judge.
4. The child was previously placed in non-secure custody, and has run away or committed a delinquent act.
5. The child appears to have run away from another county after being delinquent or being charged with delinquency there.

If a child is not released, a hearing must be held within 24 hours (not including Saturday, Sunday, and legal holidays) of the decision not to release him/her. The parent, legal guardian, or custodian must be notified of this and of the reasons for holding the child. They must also be notified of the child's whereabouts, unless there is reason to believe that this notice would present immediate danger to the child. The parent, guardian, and legal custodian are informed of the time and location of the physical custody hearing. They have the right to legal representation at this hearing, regardless of ability to pay, and the right to present evidence and to cross-examine.

II. Outcomes of the Court Process

A. Plea Hearings

At the beginning of the hearing, the child and the parent, guardian, or legal custodian are informed of their rights. The public is excluded from any hearings by the Juvenile Court, unless the child requests a public fact-finding hearing. The court will not allow a public hearing if the parents object to it in a nondelinquency matter, or if the victim of an alleged sexual assault objects. Plea hearings may be conducted before the judge. A parent may choose to take an advocate with him or her to this proceeding.

B. Consent Decree

A Consent Decree can be entered into at any time after the petition is filed and before the judgment is entered. In a Consent Decree a child is under supervision in his or her own home or present placement. The court sets requirements for behavior that apply to both the child and parents. The child, if 12 years of age or older, and the person filing the petition both need to consent to enter into the agreement. The Consent Decree typically expires after six months. It can be discharged sooner or extended if appropriate actions are taken.

If before the Consent Decree expires, a child objects to its continuation or if any party to it fails to fulfill its conditions, the original hearing will be continued as if the Consent Decree were never entered into. A child who completes the period of supervision without reinstatement of the original petition cannot be brought to court again for the same allegations alleged in the petition.

C. Dispositional Orders

Dispositional orders are based on evidence presented to the judge. Any party may present evidence relevant to the disposition. Among this evidence will be a report to the Court by a Dane County Cepartment of Social Services Social Worker. This report will include:

1. a social history of the child,
2. a recommendation of treatment which uses the "least restrictive means" available to accomplish the objective of the plan,
3. identification of a person or an agency to be primarily responsible for provision of services,
4. a statement of objectives and behavior or skills needed by the child.

Whenever possible, efforts are made to preserve the family unit. The dispositional order will contain an expiration date, usually one year unless the judge specifies less time. It is possible for the order to be extended. If the child is placed outside the home, a permanency plan is also included. This is a "plan designed to ensure that a child is reunified with his or her family whenever possible, or that the child quickly attains a placement or home providing long-term stability."

It is required by law that whenever a judge orders a child to be placed outside the home because the child was found to be in need of protection and services, the judge must verbally explain to the parents in court any grounds that exist for terminating parental rights, and changes that are required in the parent's behavior, home life, or in the child's behavior in order for the child to be returned home. This same information is required to be in any written order that places a child out of the home.

The following is a list of dispositions that are allowed by law for a child adjudged delinquent or in need of protectional services. All of these are applicable to a finding of delinquency. Only the starred (*) items apply to a child found to be in need of protection and services.

1. * Counsel the child, parent, guardian, or legal custodian.
2. * Place the child under supervision of an agency or an adult, under conditions set by the judge, including reasonable rules for the child's well-being. For example, Home Detention Program and required school attendance.
3. * Provide services to the family: for example, counseling, homemaker, respite care, daycare, and parent-skill training.
4. * Out-of-home placement: for example, the home of a relative, a licensed foster or group home, or a licensed treatment center. (Legal custody of the child may be transferred to a relative or to a county agency if the treatment and care of the child is not consented to by the parent or guardian.)
5. Placement in a secure correctional facility. (Legal custody of the child is transferred to the corrections department.)
6. Make restitution (community service hours and/or monetary restitution).
7. If no services are needed or appropriate, the judge may impose a $50.00 forfeiture.
8. Participation in a supervised work program. (The work program should be appropriate to the age and the ability of the child and be combined with counseling.)
9. * Supervised independent living. (Legal custody may be transferred if the parent does not consent.) This is only for children age 17 or older.
10. Restrict, suspend, or revoke the driving privileges of the child if the violation of law involved a motor vehicle.

III. Some Rights and Obligations of the Court Process

A. Right to Counsel

Note: Counsel is defined as an attorney active in an adversary role who protects the legal rights of the person being represented.

1. Any child alleged to be delinquent or held in a secure detention facility is entitled to legal counsel.

2. Any child alleged to be in need of protection and services may have counsel at the discretion of the court. The court may not place a child out of his or her home if the child is not represented by counsel. If the child is alleged to be abused and is under age 12, the court will appoint a guardian ad litem who will represent the "best interest" of the child.

3. Any parent under age 18 must be represented in court by an attorney.

4. If a CHIPS petition is contested, the child cannot be placed out of his or her home unless the nonpetitioning parent (parent who does not sign the petition) is represented, and at any later proceedings. Even if the petition is not contested, the parent must be represented by an attorney at the hearing at which placement is made, unless the parent properly gives up the right to representation.

5. Any party is entitled to select an attorney of his or her choice at his or her expense for representation at any proceeding covered by this chapter.

B. Parents' Contribution to Cost of Court

Based on a statement of income, assets and living expenses, the parents of a child adjudged to be in need of protection and services or to be delinquent may have to contribute to the expense of subsequent services to the child. The parent or guardian may have to reimburse a portion of the child's or parent's legal fees, also. The amount determined to be reimbursed can be reviewed by the court. If parent or guardian is ordered to make reimbursement payments, failure to do so may result in contempt of court proceedings. (Under certain conditions, reimbursement is not required.)

The expenses of examinations ordered by the court are the responsibility of parents also, according to their ability to pay and/or their insurance coverage. If parents have no insurance, do not have Medical Assistance, and are not able to pay for examinations, then the request for examinations will be submitted to the Dane County Mental Health Center. There the request will be screened and the examinations will be assigned to professionals with whom the county has contracted. If the parent or guardian objects to a particular physician or psychiatrist or other expert, the parents can attempt to negotiate through their social worker for an exception.

Parent Haven thanks MARY SCHUSTER for preparing this information
on the Children's Code and Juvenile Court

LEGAL REPRESENTATION IN JUVENILE COURT

Your child will be represented by a lawyer. Usually, the lawyer will be assigned to your child and the expense will be paid by the county. For many parents, this turns out to feel quite distressing. It may well be that you and your child have been fighting each other about important issues for a long time. But when a CHIPS petition or a delinquency petition has been filed, you and your child become adversaries in a legal sense. You may feel that the child protection system has taken over your parental role. Your child may feel quite powerful because of the ability to speak through a lawyer.

Parents have a right to legal representation in matters affecting the health and welfare of their child. You should be informed of this right by the social worker assigned to deal with you about what is being done in your child's case. However, most parents are not entitled to free legal representation in juvenile court.

When do parents need a lawyer? You certainly could decide to retain a lawyer right away when court and social services enter your teenager's life, but you might want to wait a while because of the expense involved. You need a lawyer if you reach a point where you feel there is a conflict in which your interests are not being represented adequately. You may feel "I need help, I'm frustrated. Don't I have any rights here?" You also may need a lawyer if you feel you're being asked to reveal things you are uneasy about telling to someone (perhaps your child's social worker). You may be afraid that if you tell about some problem it will be held against you. If you find yourself feeling this, it may be time to say "I want to talk about this with my lawyer." Be aware that hiring a lawyer will not necessarily result in court decisions that are entirely satisfactory to you.

Legal expenses. The cost of having a lawyer consult with parents or represent parents in court may sometimes be paid by the state if the parent is low-income. However, even low-income parents cannot receive free legal services if parents have petitioned the court for assistance. For example if parents are saying the child is uncontrollable, or saying they cannot provide for the child, then they cannot have free legal representation even if they are indigent.

A parent who wants to hire a lawyer can "shop around" to find out rates. $40 to $70 an hour is an expectable range. Legal counsel can be quite expensive, like therapy. Like therapy, it can be very useful, or it can seem like a waste of money. The best lawyer for your situation is not necessarily the cheapest one, or the most expensive either. You will want to find a lawyer with experience and interest in practicing juvenile law. The lawyer you may already consult about issues such as real estate or making a will is not necessarily the best lawyer for you to hire for juvenile court.

Finding a lawyer. You may want to get recommendations from friends, or other parents in a juvenile situation like yours. Some community agencies will make suggestions based on their experience. The State Bar of Wisconsin has a referral service. You can phone them at 257-3838 and ask for names of lawyers who are interested in practicing law with juvenile and family situations. When you have some names to consider, you can make phone contact and ask whether the lawyer gives a free consultation. At a consultation, you can ask questions such as:

- What experience have you had with teenagers, families, the juvenile court?
- What are your biases about children and parents? Why do you think teenagers get into the kinds of trouble my teenager is experiencing?
- Why are you interested in practicing family law?
- What would it cost to hire you?

During the consultation, ask yourself "Is this lawyer a person I could work with, and feel

comfortable with?"

Using your lawyer to help speed up decisions. Some parents are concerned because it often takes a long time after a child first gets into trouble, before the juvenile system gets effectively under way with trying to remedy the problems. Children then may lose all fear or respect for the system. You can tell your lawyer you want the process to move quickly. Then your lawyer could make requests to the judge to order speedier action than the law requires. For example,the judge could order that a psychological evaluation be completed within 30 days.

Being an assertive parent. During the long process of decision-making within the juvenile system, a parent may often feel powerless. Nevertheless it is important for parents to speak up in an assertive way. Write down your questions and concerns. Try to be clear in your own mind about what you think will help your teenager. Watch for appropriate times to express your opinions. Talk to your social worker about what you think of plans that are proposed. When the judge asks, "Do the parents have anything to say?", speak up. The judge cannot read your mind, and what you say can make a difference. Remember that <u>assertive</u> implies "clear, strong, and calm". Being <u>aggressive</u> is different; that implies "anger and combat" and will probably not do your family any good at all.

PARENT HAVEN THANKS ATTORNEY BEVERLY MASSING AND ATTORNEY JANET GILL HERNANDEZ
FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE WITH THIS SECTION

GOING THROUGH CHANNELS TO APPEAL

When you and your teenager are involved with the juvenile system, and you are not happy with an order of the court, you can approach the court and seek a change in the decision. You can also approach the court if you feel the social worker assigned to your case is not following the order of the court. Social workers cannot change court orders.

If you are not happy with the way in which a court order is being carried out, and if you feel your problem or complaint is a major one, the following are five steps you could take.

1. **Talk to your social worker at Dane County Department of Social Services.** It is your responsibility to communicate with your worker - to let your worker know what you may have concerns about: for example, any disagreements or complaints about the service agreement. This means you must speak up for yourself to let workers know. Does your worker know how you are <u>feeling</u>? If you are afraid to disagree because the worker may "use this against me", tell the worker this. If you do communicate your feelings, complaints, and so on, but do not see any changes (for example, if "disagree" is merely written down on paper) then ask your worker what is being done, or ask the worker to <u>explain the reasons why</u> nothing is being changed. If you are having trouble doing this Step 1, maybe you could bring a friend, a family member, or another person from your parents'group for support, or possibly ask your homemaker or case aide to help you communicate.

2. **Ask your social worker to set up a three-person meeting:** you, your worker, and the unit supervisor. Your worker should already know what your problem or complaint is about (step 1) because the supervisor will ask if you have tried to settle with your worker. It would be best to be organized and prepared for this meeting to explain to the supervisor what the problem is and why it cannot be solved with the worker.

3. **If step 2 does not help, ask supervisor how to take the next step in appeal.** It is the supervisor's responsibility to provide you with this information. You can put your complaint in writing and send it to the Director of Social Services, Dane County, 1202 Northport Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53704. Then, the Director may or may not choose to schedule a hearing for you. It is up to the Director to decide this, depending on whether he thinks you have a "legitimate" complaint, but there is no guarantee that you will have a hearing. You therefore have a better chance of being heard and getting things changed by going through steps 1 and 2. An attorney is not necessary for steps 1, 2, or 3.

4. **If you still wish to continue, file a State Appeals Form.** Agency personnel will tell you what steps to follow. You should confer with your attorney because this may or may not be an option for you.

5. **At any point in this process you with your attorney may file appeals through the legal/court system.** However, this is not likely to be successful. The court almost always supports the agency. For this reason it is best if you can make your appeal within the agency.

IT IS PROBABLY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE TO TRY TO WORK
THINGS OUT WITH YOUR SOCIAL WORKER DIRECTLY
IF YOU POSSIBLY CAN.

- Parent Haven thanks Sarah Stitsinger & Linda Rasmussen for preparing this outline

SECTION IV:

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

ABOUT OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

"PAIN" - A Parent's Feelings
Types of Out-Of-Home Placements
"The Parent in the Shadows"
Rights & Responsibilities When Child Is Placed Outside Your Home

PAIN

PAIN - When you go to the hospital for an operation they prepare you for the amount and kind of pain you'll have, and as a woman you're aware of the pain that goes along with childbirth. But no one can prepare you for the pain you'll feel over the loss of a child. The loss I'm speaking of is because - for whatever reason - the child decides your home is no longer where he/she wants to live, and you are not the ones he/she wants as authority figures. So he/she chooses to exercise the rights assigned to children by the system and moves out. This child is probably between the ages of 10 - 17. For a minor to be able to leave his/her present home, it seems like they have to make you, the parents look like God awful persons who persecute, mistreat, and neglect them. That's the first stab of pain in the heart. After all, you've thought of yourself as a good parent, sacrificing many times and things for your children only to be informed it either isn't enough or they don't want it.

The child probably starts his/her crusade for independence by running away. Then you have the pain of not knowing where they are for days, weeks, and God forbid maybe months. As the days and hours drag on the pain of what can happen to them out there continues until finally they're found. Then a new pain begins. The system takes over "protecting these poor innocent children", who have managed to survive quite well for weeks on the streets, God knows we would have failed to do so well.

The child is placed in Shelter, a temporary home for children needing protection from parents until they get it court approved and a more permanent separation is provided.

SHELTER - I can never express the pain I felt and still feel passing by there in the car. I can never figure out why the kids think it's so great - the doors are locked so you have to ring the doorbell to visit them and for the first time in your life you have visiting hours to see your own children. Visiting hours were no consideration at 2 A.M. feedings - sitting up all night with sick crying children, but now you have set times to exercise parental obligations and believe me there are still lots of obligations, not many rights, but lots of obligations.

As I stand inside Shelter handing over to my child all her worldly belongings, it finally hits me, she's <u>not</u> coming home and probably won't for a long time, if ever. As I fight to stop the flood of tears and the agonizing pain tearing at my heart till I think I'll choke, I step outside.

Another mother, obviously feeling the same way, joins me. How did it get this way? "If only I hadn't let my daughter go to all those school dances", the other mother says. "Now I know she never attended them, she stayed outside smoking pot and meeting boys."

How ironic, I thought, as I tried to console her: "It probably wouldn't have made much difference. You see, <u>my</u> daughter is here because she never was allowed to do those things. There are no cut and dry answers, no one gives you instructions on if you raise children this or that way you're guaranteed 100% success." We both cry, and leave.

Shelter, yes, that was the start. And even after a year and a half - and even though my daughter is now back home - I still have great stabs of pain as I drive past there. An everlasting irreversible pain of lost time raising my child, the pain of being told I don't know what is best for my child, and the pain of a relationship that has a rift that will always be there throughout the rest of our lifetime.

PAIN - tell me or any other parent who has experienced such pain that it goes away, like birth pains you forget, but **NEVER!** The only hope for parents, in my opinion, is groups like Parent Haven where parents can be a support to one another. We can't take away the pain, but just letting let you know we do understand and it is alright to cry, scream, get angry, and yes, sometimes even hate. It does help.

Now as I go through the same steps with my second daughter who feels the need to exercise her rights and independence, I thank Parent Haven for being there. **THANK YOU!**

LONDA

TYPES OF OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS

The Juvenile Court may order placement of an adolescent outside the home. There are a number of different kinds of placements. Parents should be aware that usually there is a scarcity of openings. Also parents need to know that costs of out-of-home placement are substantial and that parents will usually be required to contribute toward those costs. The following is a brief outline of placements available for Dane County adolescents. For more details, ask your social worker or call us at Parent Haven (256-3890).

1. **Shelter Home.** This is a large house in Madison which provides temporary care and supervision while decisions are being made whether the child will return home or be placed elsewhere.

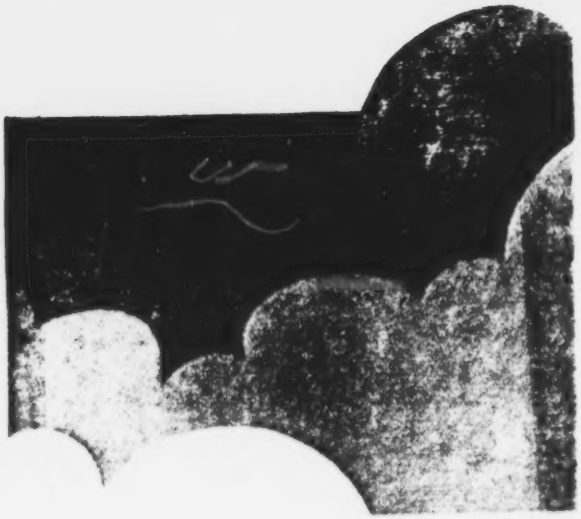
2. **Bockari House.** A short-term receiving home in Madison which provides short-term placement for boys or girls. Not more than 60 days in any 6-month period.

3. **Foster Homes.** Licensed homes where adults, often the parents of children who also live there, provide care and supervision for one or more foster children.

4. **Group Foster Homes.** Licensed homes where paid staff provide care and supervision for 6 to 8 adolescents. Usually the program includes group therapy, family therapy, behavior contracts. Group homes for girls include: Coventry House and Horizon House. Group homes for boys include: Odyssey House, Sojourn House, and Wyeth House. Thoreau House accepts both boys and girls who have completed inpatient treatment for alcohol/drug dependency.

5. **Residential Treatment Facilities.** Licensed child-caring facilities which house larger numbers of adolescents. These facilities may specialize in treating particular adolescent problems. For example, Apogee (operated by Tellurian Community) and the Martin Luther Treatment Centers specialize in treating alcohol and other drug abuse. When the court decides that a suitable treatment facility for a particular juvenile is not available in Dane County, the child may be placed elsewhere. Residential treatment facilities where Parent Haven members' children have been placed include: Norris Adolescent Center in Mukwanago, St. Rose Residence in Milwaukee, Northwest Passage in Webster, and Sunburst Youth Homes in Neillsville.

6. **Juvenile Correctional Facilities.** These are secure (locked) facilities, and there are two of them in Wisconsin: Ethan Allen School for Boys, at Wales; and Lincoln Hills, north of Wausau, which houses both girls and boys.



THE PARENT in the SHADOWS

Published expressions of the feelings of parents of placed children are rare. This article was written by Mrs. McAdams, a housewife and mother of six children who were placed in foster family care. It appeared as the leading article in the Journal of Public Social Services, Vol.1, No. 4, December 1970.

What is it like to have your children placed in foster care? How does it feel to find yourself in the role of visitor in your own child's home?

These are a few of the questions I've been asked by groups of foster parents and social workers during the past few years. I've tried to answer them honestly and objectively, but it is pretty hard to be objective about something as painfully personal as losing custody of your children and having them placed in foster homes. Probably any parent who has gone through this experience sees it differently.

I became mentally ill during the early 1960's. My depressive state gradually became so severe that I could no longer maintain the home or care for my family and myself properly. I was committed to a state hospital and my children were declared dependents of the court. The six children were first placed in Snediger Cottage and subsequently placed by pairs in three foster homes.

I remained in the hospital for about a year, and upon my release continued intensive outpatient therapy. It was several years before I was able to assume full responsibility for the care of all six children.

I maintained close contact with both the social worker and the children during this period in which the children were being gradually returned to their own home. Sometimes in my attempt to maintain contact with all my children I felt like I was running an obstacle course, and if it hadn't been for a couple of workers who just refused to let me give up, I think I would have thrown in the towel on a number of occasions.

The Advantages

As a natural parent I have very ambivalent feelings toward the foster care program in general. I tend to concentrate on the negative aspects of foster care and sort of push the positive points in the background. Perhaps I should list some of the advantages, as far as my children's situation was concerned, and then go on to the criticisms.

The first and most obvious advantage in the case of my kids was that foster care answered an immediate need for a stable home environment and parental supervision at a time of crisis and emotional turmoil.

The four oldest children were boys aged 8 through 12. Several of the foster fathers were hikers and campers, and this made it possible for the boys to take part in activities of this sort at a time in their life when they were of great importance. This opportunity probably would not have been available to them in our fatherless urban home.

All the children were instilled with certain habits of routine and order, something that I had not stressed enough in the home.

Their study habits improved, and this has had a direct influence on their performance in school during the past several years that they have been back in their own home. The oldest boy, at 19, finished his first year at college on the honor roll. The second boy, at 18, was offered two excellant academic scholarships - one at UC Berkeley, and the other, which he accepted, at a very highly rated private university. The other four children give every indication of doing at least as well. Sure, these kids were very bright, but it was only through the efforts of some very perceptive and persistent foster parents and social workers that they continued to work up to their potential in school at a time when it would have been easy to goof off, with the very good excuse that they were being shifted around from place to place and school to school.

All of the children formed lasting friendships and still keep in contact with a number of foster parents and friends met in the various foster homes.

Some Problems

I just wish that my impression of foster care were limited to the preceding, but although some of the negative aspects cannot be eliminated, there are quite a few problems which I feel would not have to exist at all, if there were just more of an attempt at communication and understanding between workers, parents and foster parents.

The fact that you are visiting your child in a foster home is a reminder you are, at least for the time being, a failure as a parent. You are very sensitive, especially during the first visit. Sometimes a foster parent, in a well-meaning effort to let you know that your child is doing well in a foster home, will make comments on how well the child is eating, how neat he keeps himself and his room, how happy he is, etc. To me, this type of remark was just an implied criticism of the care I had given my child, and was a verbal slap in the face.

It would have been easier to talk to my children if I had been kept up to date on what they had been doing. I understand that frequent phone calls can be very disruptive, but perhaps if a foster parent could just have dropped a brief note on a postcard once a week, it would have made communication between my child and me less strained.

It is surprising how many legitimate excuses you can come up with to avoid visiting your children in foster homes. Sometimes a failure to visit frequently

on the part of the natural parent is not an indication that they don't care, but that they care too much.

You see your child in a home situation where everything is apparently orderly and calm, and quite often materially superior to anything you are going to be able to offer them, and you wonder why the hell you are bothering to rock the boat . . . maybe it would be better to leave your child there, it would be a lot less upsetting for everyone involved if you would just drop out of the picture. Quite often this is true. As the parent you would like to avoid the pain the visit causes you. The child, though he loves you, probably isn't too thrilled over the prospect of the emotional upheaval of the visit. The foster parent, who has to cope with the behavioral problems that a visit might bring up in the child, is just as content not to have the routine of the home shaken up. Yes, sometimes staying away is the easiest for everyone, but when your whole life has been torn up and you are somehow trying to reassemble the pieces, I don't see how things could be easy.

I blame the social workers for not pushing visiting on the part of a reluctant parent. If there is a natural parent in the picture, there is always a chance, even in long-term placements, that that parent is going to regain custody of the child. A parent who is out of contact and then, after a year or two, is in a position to have the child returned, is going to have a very rough time trying to establish a workable relationship with that child. It is very important that the social worker make every effort to gain the confidence of natural parents and if necessary force them to take an interest in their child, even when they are away from home.

The foster parent who gives you orders and instructions in the presence of your child is another problem. You are told that you should have the child back in the foster home at 5 o'clock, and admonished not to be late, or you are told to be sure little Tommy doesn't go outside without his sweater, as he has just recovered from a cold. These instructions may be necessary , but your kid, no matter how young, is already aware of the fact that you have little authority at this time, and this only increases the child's concern as to how responsible you are. If it is necessary to give the natural parent instructions about taking the child away from the foster home on an outing, it would be better to do so out of the child's presence.

No matter how courteous a foster parent is, the natural parent still have the feeling that they have very little to say in the decisions made for their child. There is no reason why the natural parents can't be consulted on some of the decisions regarding the child, even if they are only small ones, such as the color of a soon-to-be-purchased coat, ot the advisability of getting a haircut. Being asked your opinion about matters concerning your child is a step toward the time when you will be making decisions yourself again, and will help restore your confidence in your ability to do so. I think it is the responsibility of both the social worker and the child's foster parent to involve the natural parent even if she doesn't show too much interest in being involved.

Parent Competition

I think it is possible for foster parents and natural parents to have mutual respect for each other, but the very nature of their relationship makes it impossible to avoid

elements of jealousy and competition. In the case of my children, finding themselves in the position of having foster parents whom they loved and admired and yet having to cope with me trying to strengthen their love for me and regain their trust was almost too much. As far as they were concerned they couldn't have two sets of parents, and the only solution was to reject one and keep the other. Often it was just simply not wanting to give up the sure thing, a stable foster home, for the uncertainty of when I would be able to reestablish a home for them. This problem took a lot of effort at all levels, before they accepted the fact that love for one set of parents did not imply disloyalty to the other.

I know quite often children return from visits with the natural parents with all sorts of plans and promises given them during the visit. It is very difficult to deny a child any hope when the immediate situation seems to be pretty bleak. My kids were able to extract tentative promises of when we would all be reunited, because my pride was killing me and I didn't have the heart to say that I had no home, no money, and no definate time when I would have sufficient emotional and financial resources for getting these things.

I believe one of the most damaging things a foster parent may do to a child, quite often without conscious intent, is to undermine that child's opinion of the natural parent. It must be very difficult for a foster parent to refrain from passing moral judgement on a natural parent whose offenses have been particularly unpleasant or even criminal, but that person is still the child's parent and the more the foster parent knocks him, the more the child is obligated to defend him.

A foster parent should always keep in mind that the child who has come to him from a deprived atmosphere may very likely be returned to an environment that may be inferior to the one he can offer the child. This is a condition which he can help the child to accept gracefully and even with pride. A foster parent can be very helpful by letting the child know that it is a fact that certain people live differently but that home condition has no real bearing on the child's worth as a person.

If it is the habit of the foster family to attend church regularly, but it is unlikely that this will be possible when the child returns to the natural home, the foster parent should not make the child feel that this is the only way to live. Encouraging the child to participate in community activities, and belong to organizations such as the Boys Clubs, when they can continue when they return home, is another way a foster parent can help the youngster make the transition from one environment to another.

A couple of my kids ran into a situation in which foster parents in a misguided effort to show my children how much they cared for them, told them that they enjoyed and cared for children so much that they would keep them even if they were not being paid for their care. My children, instead of being flattered and pleased, were resentful. They did not like to feel that they were receiving charity form either the county or the foster parents. I think a simple explanation about the purposes of taxes would be helpful to all foster children. When they understand that everyone pays taxes as sort of insurance toward the day when they may be in need, and that the child himself will someday be a taxpayer for this same purpose for someone else, it may be the start of teaching the child that he too will have a responsibility to assist other people. If the child's parents contribute to his care while he is in a foster home, he should know this too.

Although I have a number of criticisms of foster care, I have never allowed

my children to involve me in a discussion of personalities while they were living in a particular home. As long as they have to live in the home, I think they must learn as much as possible to resolve their own differences with the persons they are living with in the foster home. If these conflicts of personality become too marked, then I think the child should feel close enough to the social worker to be able to discuss the problem.

My children were returned to me gradually, one or two at a time. During this period I relied very much on the social worker. I had little or no faith in my ability to manage a home and family. My children were skeptical as to how much they could depend on me. I found my self having to prove myself over and over again. I couldn't blame them for I was their mother and, for whatever reason, I had allowed them to be seperated and go through the foster home routine. Learning to live together was a big task, but we managed it, and it has been well worth the effort required of everyone to make it work.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN YOUR CHILD IS PLACED OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

A Parent's Rights

1. To have legal representation in matters regarding the health and welfare of your child (see page 66 for information about legal representation in juvenile court).
2. To receive adequate notice of any legal proceedings concerning your child.
3. To have the final say in such decisions as religious affiliation, certain medical authorizations (for example, major surgery), getting a driver's license, consent for marriage, etc.
4. To participate in planning for your child, to receive a copy of the case plan, and to receive notice of any formal review of your child's case plan.
5. To visit and communicate with your child within reasonable guidelines as set by the service plan or the court.
6. To be provided with opportunities to demonstrate your capacity to provide a suitable home for your child, and to regain custody of your child as quickly as possible, when it is consistent with the health and welfare needs of your child.
7. To receive a written description of the expectations you must meet in order to have your child returned home, and of the services the agency will provide to help you meet these expectations.
8. To receive services, in accordance with the service plan, to assist you in overcoming the conditions which led to the removal of your child.
9. To have information maintained by the social service agency about you kept confidential.
10. To appeal decisions made by the agency and the courts (see page 68 for information about appeals).

A Parent's Responsibilities

1. To visit your child in foster care.
2. To contribute financially toward the cost of foster care.
3. To abide by court orders.
4. To maintain regular contact with your social worker and to keep all scheduled appointments.
5. To keep your social worker informed of any major changes in your life situations, such as change of address, telephone, job, income, marriage, living arrangements, etc.
6. To make reasonable progress toward resolving problems so that your child can return home if at all possible.
7. To participate in decisions and plans affecting you and your child while you are involved in foster care.

THIS LIST WAS DEVELOPED BY SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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SECTION V:

FINDING PROFESSIONAL HELP AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Looking for Counseling or Therapy
Some Free Resources for Help with Teenagers

LETTER FROM A PARENT HAVEN MOM

I can only speak of my own experience knowing my own child. My daughter has a drug and alcohol problem. What I found in my teen may differ from person to person.

She would come home from school with very dilated eyes, emotional, and listless. Her grades took a drop in school, behavior was bad in school, skipping classes, and evasive about her friends.

When you start hearing this DON'T YOU TRUST ME ? with every question, don't go on a guilt trip. Do a little checking.

- Jan

LOOKING FOR COUNSELING OR THERAPY

Why would you look for therapy? When a family is trying to work things out with a pre-teen or teenager who is involved with the juvenile court or the social services system, one way to seek help is to connect up with a counselor or therapist. Sometimes counseling is ordered by the court. Other times, the family decides on their own to find therapy, because they may feel they are "stuck" in a puzzling situation and want expert help right away instead of waiting for a judge to require it.

Who would you want a therapist to be helping? Before you start hunting for a counselor, you might think about these questions: Could the whole family use some therapy together at this time? Often the difficulties children are having put a strain on the whole family. Or parents problems may be affecting the children as well as the parents themselves. So you might decide that all of you would want to see the same therapist, or a therapy team. Are all the family members willing to participate? How about family members that do not live in the same house with your teenager (a divorced mother or father, an older brother or sister, a grandparent)? It may turn out to be appropriate for the family to make use of a number of different kinds of counseling help. Could one or both parents benefit from separate therapy for their own needs? Could your teenager benefit from separate therapy for his or her own needs?

How would you begin finding a therapist for your special situation? You will probably want to start by asking several different people for suggestions - your friends, pastor, school staff who know your teenager. Ask someone you already know and trust who works in a community agency that deals with many parents and children. (You might call Family Enhancement at 256-3890. The agency keeps a file of resources that parents have found helpful.) Ask your physician, or your Health Maintenance Organization, for recommendations. Find out what limitations your health insurance places on your freedom of choice. When someone makes a suggestion, ask some questions, for example: What do you know about this therapist? Does this counselor work well with children? What kind of training does the person have? Does this professional helper seem to develop good relationships with parents?

What would therapy cost? Costs of different kinds of therapeutic help vary a great deal. Your pastor, or your school counselor, for example, may be glad to talk to you about your teenager a few times without charge. Some community agencies provide certain specialized counseling services free: for example, Briarpatch Youth Organization has trained volunteers who are available to meet with parents and teenagers several times without charge; and the Parental Stress Center provides group counseling for adolescents and parents affected by incest. A number of community agencies are subsidized by United Way or other funds, so that they can provide free or sliding-scale therapy services to low-income families. These agencies include the Dane County Mental Health Center, Catholic Social Services, Jewish Social Services, Children's Service Society, and Family Services. At times, these agencies have long waiting lists; other times, it can be rather quick and easy to make an appointment and begin counseling.

If you plan to use health insurance to pay for counseling or therapy, you may find many limitations upon your choice of professionals. Also,the number of sessions and the total amount of cost covered

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by your insurance will be limited. For example, your coverage for a full year may be limited to 5 or 10 sessions per family member, or there may be a limit of $500 to $1000 a year for therapy.

If you pay for therapy out of your own pocket, costs may range from $30 to $90 an hour. The higher rates are usually charged by psychiatrists; they are medical doctors who can prescribe medications if needed. Lower rates may be charged by some psychologists; they are not medical doctors. Usually the lowest rates are charged by professionals whose degrees are in counseling or social work. The ability of a professional to help your family is not necessarily related to how expensive or low-cost the sessions are.

So, depending on your situation and the choices you make, therapy may cost very little or a great deal. Therapy can also seem not worth much, or it can seem worth its weight in gold.

Interviewing and choosing a therapist. After you have assembled some suggestions of recommended therapists, you may want to interview one or more of them. You may be able to set up a short introductory interview at no cost, or you may have to pay. Ask about this when you phone to set up the appointment. Write down a list of questions you will ask during the interview. Here are some possible questions: What is your experience working with teenagers? Are you experienced in working with drug and alcohol problems? Have you worked with teenagers who run away? Why do you think teenagers skip school? What experience have you had with children who are in foster care or group homes? Do you have any kids of your own? What are some of the reasons why you think teenagers get into trouble such as our family is experiencing? What kinds of records do you keep when you do therapy with a teenager and parents? Are these records confidential? Can parents read the records? If you intend to send reports on the therapy to schools, court, social workers, etc., can we read those reports before they are sent? If we are not satisfied with what you report to others, can we add our own statements to your report?

Making a commitment to therapy. Therapy is not magic. Usually, it is an uncomfortable experience at least part of the time. You may feel angry at a counselor and want to never return. Your teenager may refuse to go to therapy sessions. Your spouse may refuse. But your family will need to make a commitment in order to get any benefit. It is possible your first choice therapist will not be "right" for you, and you can decide to "fire" that therapist and find another. But don't just quit therapy because it is hard work. Turning around the problems of your teenager and your family is worth a lot of hard work!

PARENT HAVEN THANKS KATHY STAECKER, A FAMILY THERAPIST, FOR HER CONTRIBUTION OF IDEAS FOR THIS SECTION

SOME FREE RESOURCES FOR HELP WITH YOUR PRETEEN OR TEENAGER

The following are some of the free resources you can contact if you want to explore getting help from outside your family. You are not alone!

Your Friends Who Are Parents: ask your friends how they cope with teens, and what resources or methods have helped them.

The Parents of Your Child's Friends: If you don't already know them, consider getting acquainted. They may be concerned about the same things that bother you. Share ideas. Keep in touch. Maybe together you can establish some rules or make some changes that will help. Build your "Parents' Grapevine."

Your Child's School. A teacher, principal, counselor, psychologist or social worker there may know your child well enough to give you some perspective about your child. Do they feel concerned about your child? Do they think you are just dealing with ordinary adolescent "growing pains"? How much help can they provide? Where do they think you should seek help? Does your school have a parents support group?

Your pastor or rabbi. Ask for an appointment and explain your concerns. Some clergy are skilled and experienced counselors. Others may have helpful suggestions about counselors or groups that may share some of your values.

Parent Haven: 256-3890. A weekly support group for parents who are concerned about the behavior of their preteens or teenagers. Meets Tuesday nights, 7:30, at 605 Spruce Street in Madison. A place to come when you are hurting, or want new information. A program of Family Enhancement.

Parental Stressline: 251-2266. A talking-it-over line 24 hours a day, answered by volunteers in their own homes. They have time to listen & help you think about what to do.

Parents Anonymous: 251-9464. A weekly support group for parents who believe they have a problem with child abuse. Meets in various locations, various times. A program of the Parental Stress Center.

Parents of Hyperactive Children: 249-8506. Childrens' Service Society provides this support group. Sometimes a child's behavior problems result partly from a condition called attention deficit disorder, which needs special treatment. If you suspect your very active child has this disorder, staff or the group can help you find out.

Parents of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Children: 257-5888. This is a new support network being developed by the Wisconsin Alliance for the Mentally Ill. For parents whose children are under age 18.

Parent Tapes on Teens: 263-3100. 24 hours a day. Brief taped messages about a variety of topics. Ask your hospital for the complete topic list, or call Parent Haven and we will mail you a list. Sample topics:

"Ready to Kick Your Kid Out of the House?"	tape number 5203
"Helping Your Teen Deal With His/Her Emotions"	tape number 5200
"When You Feel Like Hitting Your Kid"	tape number 5202

PICADA (Prevention and Intervention Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse): 251-4558. This phone line provides information and referral for your concerns about your teenager's use of chemicals. Parents and teenagers can also talk with staff in the office. If your family needs to get involved with Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous or a similar support groups; and/or you need referral to some kind of treatment program, PICADA can help you.

Briarpatch Youth Organization: 251-1126. Parents and teenagers can phone them, or just walk in, to talk about their concerns. They have volunteer counselors and volunteer foster homes for brief "cooling off" periods. Briarpatch also sponsors Teen Rap Line, 255-0500, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. daily, where you could encourage your son or daughter to call and talk with a trained volunteer teenage counselor. Another program of Briarpatch is CHOICES, a weekly support group for teenage young women.

Dane County Youth Commission: 266-5665. They have a list of many different agencies and programs for young people. You can pick up a free copy of this "Youth Resources Guide" at their office in the City-County Building, 210 Monona Avenue.

OASIS: 251-9464. Provides information, support groups, and programs to help children and adults to deal with their sexual abuse experiences. A program of the Parental Stress Center.

FIRST CALL FOR HELP: 246-HELP. This is a phone service of United Way. If you are looking for a resource not listed here, they may have contact information.

SPECIAL SUPPORTS FOR VERY YOUNG PARENTS

Some of our teenagers are mothers and fathers themselves. In order to care for themselves and their children, they may need some of these resources.

School Aged Maternity Program (S.A.M.). 266-6173. This is a program of the Madison Public Schools. If your teenager lives in Dane County outside of Madison, ask your school adminsitration what special programs they provide for school age parents.

CONNECT: 256-3890. CONNECT is a project of the Family Enhancement Program. It links trained volunteers with young parents (under 21 years old) to provide a variety of supportive services. Young parents also can attend weekly Parents Place meetings or a Young Moms group.

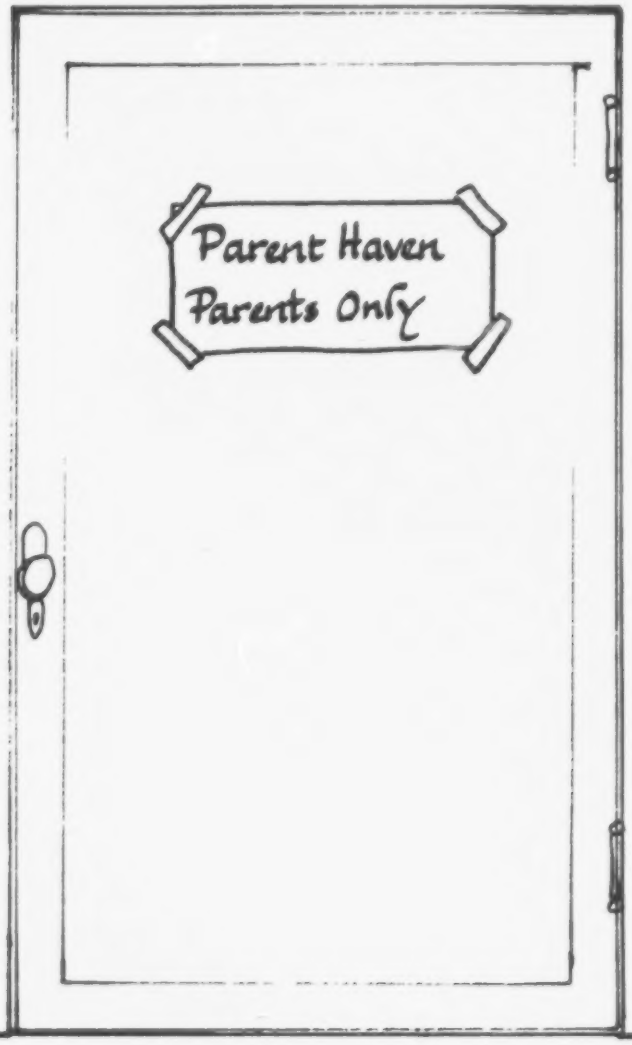
CONTACT NUMBERS FOR THE JUVENILE LEGAL SYSTEM

Dane County Social Services.	
Northport Drive Office, Madison	249-5351
South Madison Office	266-9000
Black Earth Office	767-3691
Stoughton Office	837-5636
Sun Prairie Office	837-7380
Dane County Sheriff	266-4948
Dane County Juvenile Court	266-4405

You may also wish to call the Police Department in your own municipality, whether you live in the City of Madison or in another city, town, or village in Dane County.

PARENT HAVEN THANKS SARAH HELFMAN FOR
PROOFREADING AND EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE

This handbook was put together by parents, including the staff at Family Enhancement. Many different parents contributed our real life stories. We have learned, from our own experience and from talking with other parents, that the teenage years bring some difficult times for most families. We hope our experiences will help you realize you are not alone. And we hope the information and ideas in this handbook will help you deal more confidently with your adolescent son or daughter. There are many avenues of help for families. With determination and positive support from others, parents and teens can live through those difficult adolescent years and find light at the end of the tunnel!



PARENT HAVEN is a weekly support group for parents of preteens and teenagers. You are invited to phone us at 256-3890 for information about meetings and topics. We hope you will want to participate with us in meetings. Other parents will listen to your experiences and share how they are coping. Also, professionals who volunteer their time at meetings will share their expertise with you.

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